


GRAND SCHOOL STORIES, AND EVERY STORY A GEM!

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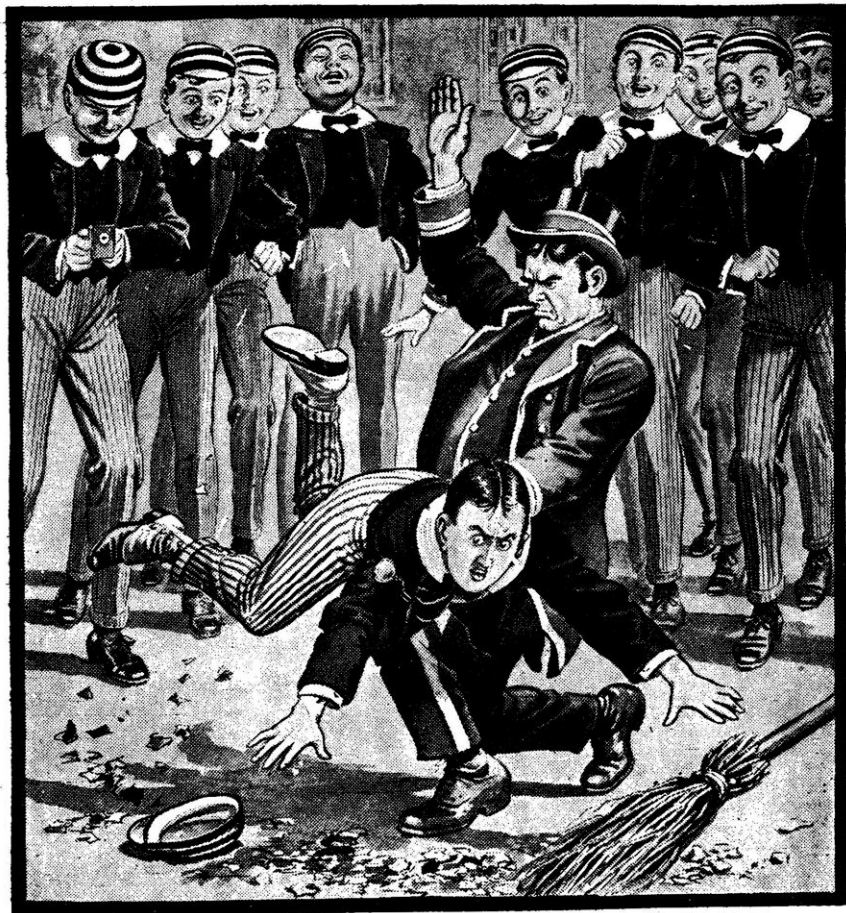
No. 245. Vol. XVIII.



"TROUBLED WATERS!" & "THE FINGER OF FATE!"

A Complete Story of St. Jim's.

A Complete Tale of St. Katie's.



A SPANKING FOR ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY!
(An Amazing Incident in the Grand School Story in this Number.)

DO NOT DELAY!

SEND IN YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO-DAY.

My Readers' Own Corner

A Page of Interesting Paragraphs Contributed by GEM Readers.

Conducted by **Your Editor.**

NOTE.—Half-a-crown will be awarded to the sender of every paragraph published on this page.

FRIENDLY.

Please compliment Mr. Michael Poole for me on having created such a lovable and interesting character as Dickie Dexter. A little pen portrait of the principal characters would be welcome.

Long may the GEM his deeds record,
The hero of St. Katie's School!
If pen is mightier than the sword,
Then great as Haig is Michael Poole!

—Gordon R. Bennett, 22, Rudthorpe Road, Holfield, Bristol.

FROM IRELAND.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said an Irish manager to his audience of three, "as there is nobody here I'll dismiss you all. The performance of this night will not be performed, but will be repeated to-morrow evening."—Thos. J. Bailey, 246, Uttoxeter Road, Normacott, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent.

TALBOT.

I have read the GEM for about three years, and have got a very good impression of Talbot. I admire him, Tom Merry, and Herries for their kindness to animals. Kerr is much liked by our chaps, as they are very keen on detectives. Kangaroo is popular, naturally. I wish you could tell us from which State he comes from. I hope it is Victoria. I was reading the Chat in No. 623, and was offended by what was said about Gussy. I should like more football, as I am football mad.—Noel Nixon, 166, St. Kilda Street, Millhill, Brighton, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

THE "GEM" AGAIN.

I can hardly praise the GEM enough. I have read it for the last three years, and have never found it dry yet. The finest tale, I think, was "The Barring Out at St. Jim's." I should like this series in book form, and I think another barring-out tale would be welcome. Being an amateur photographer, I think a page in the GEM devoted to this hobby would be good. An exchange snap system would also come in well. Should be pleased to hear from any readers interested in the camera.—E. Naylor, Watkinson Terrace, Brighshaw Lane, Alberton Bywater, near Castleford, Yorks.

A REQUEST.

Dear Editor,—I must say that your stories of Tom Merry & Co. are simply great. I have been a reader of your paper now for about three years, and have just finished the "Schoolboy Castaways," which I thoroughly enjoyed. One thing I would like to have a "Tom Merry's Weekly" on the market. I am sure that many agree with me in this matter. Is it not possible to put this through?—Gilbert Turner, 30, Stalmuir Road, Fazakerley, Liverpool.

THE SPINE.

Teacher "Tommy Jones, what is your spine?"

Tommy: "Please, ma'am, my spine is a bone down the middle of my back. My skull sits on one end and I sit on the other."

—C. Wilson, 2, Lythgoes Lane, Warrington, Lancs.

ANOTHER TESTIMONIAL.

Just a few lines to tell you how much I enjoy your papers—the good old GEM and "Mugnet." I have been a reader now for eight years, and I don't think I have ever written and grumbled about the stories. There is nothing to grumble at. I am eighteen. I never grow tired of the stories. I ran a correspondence club for four years with excellent results, though, of course, you cannot please everybody. My name has been found on the battlefields.—Miss Gladys Cooper, 12, Culmore Road, Balham, S.W. 12.

THE OLD YARNS.

I would like you to produce a big volume of the adventures of Tom Merry & Co. The new readers would like to have the old stories. I think every day of what I am going to read. I work at a shop, and find time to read your books. I have read the GEM for years, and feel sure nothing will beat it, both in quality and size.—Arthur Berry, 115B, Church Street, Preston.

LAWN TENNIS

Many of your readers are anxious to get information on the game. Why not have a page devoted to the subject? Not long since I haunted the bookshops for works on the game, but each fresh one I procured only threw my mind into a

bigger state of chaos. Finally, a clever little friend of mine drew up a plan on a sheet of notepaper, showing the court and position of the players. She marked where the first serve should fall, explained the counts, the "advantages," etc., and I saw things clearly.—Miss Hilda Dawson, 339, Broad Street, Pendleton, Manchester.

A COMPLETE CHANGE.

It was a dripping wet day in London, and the conductor had just stopped his bus to allow a Parsee in a red turban to alight.

"What sort of a chap is that?" asked the conductor of another passenger.

"He's a Parsee—worships the sun," was the reply.

"Worships the sun, does he?" said the shivering conductor. "Then I suppose he comes here to have a rest."

—William Walsh, 109, Ashmoor Street, off Moor Lane, Preston.

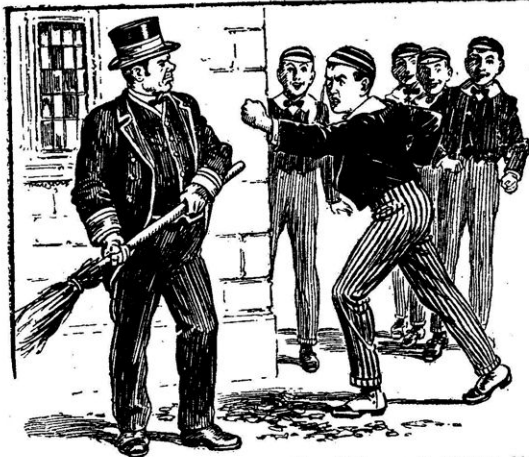
WARWICKSHIRE.

This county can claim more importance than most. It contains the birthplace of William Shakespeare, and within its confines we have Rugby, which occupies the foremost place among Public Schools. Further, we have the F.A. Cup in our county, and everybody knows with what interest the trophy is regarded. Warwickshire is as famed for its cricket as its football, and has produced some of the best wielders of the willow. The town of Southam was once the headquarters of King Charles in the Civil War.—W. G. E. Dyer, Market Place, Southam, near Rugby.

NORTH LONDON.

My home is delightfully situated in the centre of a North London suburb. The house dates from Queen Elizabeth's time, and was once a hunting-lodge of Charles the First. Above the carved oak staircase are oil-paintings showing the seasons of the year. The park is public, and you should see it on a fine summer morning. It is just a beautiful country scene, and we have plenty of birds. I am a keen reader of the "Companion Papers."—G. Ellis, Broomfield House, Broomfield Park, Palmer's Green, N. 13.

Contributions are invited from readers of the "GEM" for publication on this page. Anything will do, so long as it is interesting, short, and concise—a good joke, a description of a holiday, a bright idea for increasing the popularity of the "GEM," a good anecdote. "Pars" should not be more than three hundred words long—the shorter the better. They can be sent in on a postcard. Address all contributions to The Editor, The "GEM" Library, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and mark them "Readers' Own Corner."



TROUBLED WATERS!

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

A Magnificent Long Complete Story of Tom Merry & Co., The Chums of St Jim's.

CHAPTER I. The Picnic.

"**W**HERE'S Gussy?"
Everybody in the junior section of the School House at St. Jim's seemed to be asking that question. And no satisfactory solution was forthcoming.

It was a half-holiday, and Tom Merry & Co. had decided to devote the afternoon to cricket practice at the nets.

The presence of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not only desirable, but essential, Gussy being a member of the junior eleven. But the swell of St. Jim's was not to be found.

"Where on earth has that silly duffer got to?" ejaculated Tom Merry, for the tenth time.

"Dare say he's forgotten all about cricket practice, and gone on the river," granted Manners.

Tom Merry looked grim.
"We'll make him feel sorry for himself, if he has!" he remarked.

"Gussy's always mislaying himself," said Monty Lowther. "He ought to be taken about on a lead."
"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three, attired in their cricket flannels, patrolled the Fourth Form passage. They interrogated all the fellows they met, but could glean no information concerning the whereabouts of Arthur Augustus.

"N. G.," said Manners at length. "We've hunted high and low, but there's nothing doing. Let's get back to the cricket field."

"Half a jiffy," said Monty Lowther. "We haven't tried the dorm."

"The dorm?" echoed Tom Merry. "Gussy isn't in the habit of going to bed in the daytime!"

"No, but he's in the habit of changing his raiment about twenty times a day. Come on!"

The juniors went up the stairs three at a time, and entered the Fourth Form dormitory.

Arthur Augustus was within! He stood in front of the looking-glass; and he was engaged in parting his hair scrupulously in the middle.

Gussy's appearance, at that moment, did not suggest that he contemplated playing cricket. He wore a pair of

beautifully-creased trousers; his shoes were of patent leather, and they were polished so perfectly that Gussy could have used either of them in lieu of the looking-glass.

The swell of St. Jim's also sported a fancy waistcoat, of vivid hue, and his necktie was dazzling.

So absorbed was Arthur Augustus in the task of parting his hair that he failed to notice the Terrible Three's approach. But he was not left long in ignorance of their presence.

"Here he is!" roared Tom Merry.

"Gussy, you chump—"
"Gussy, you imbecile—"

Arthur Augustus spun round.
"Weally, deah boys!" he protested. "You have no right to apply such vulgah epithets to me!"

"What about the cricket?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"Eh?"
"Why are you getting yourself up like a blessed Beau Brummel, when you ought to be in your flannels?" demanded Manners.

"I'm not playin' cwicket this afternoon, deah boy," he said.

"Your mistake—you are!" said Tom Merry.

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Monty Lowther. "If you think we're going to let you play truant, Gussy, after taking all this trouble to find you, you're right off the wicket!"

"Postpone your appointment with Miss Bunn, of Ryecombe, and come along to the nets," said Manners.

The colour mounted to Gussy's cheeks.
"Weally, Mannahs—! I am no longan on speakin' terms with Miss Bunn. I wessent your insinuation—I hurl it back in your teeth!"

"He's getting quite melodramatic now," said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Look here, Gussy," said Tom Merry, "are you coming quietly, or must we wrench off those togs and force you to get into flannels!"

Having completed his manipulation of the hair-brush, Arthur Augustus stepped back and took a final survey of himself.

"I consider that my dwees is worthy of the occasion, deah boys," he said.

The Terrible Three stared.

"Worthy of what occasion, you ass?" exclaimed Manners.

Arthur Augustus chuckled.
"My patah will awwise shortly," he said.

"You mean to say Lord Eastwood's coming?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"Yas. He's coming oval in his cah, and he's promised to take me for a picnic in Wayland Woods. He says I can bring as many of my friends as the cah will hold."

"Hurrah!"
The Terrible Three took it for granted that they would be members of the expedition. And Gussy's good tidings banished all thought of cricket practice from their minds.

"Why didn't you tell us this before, Gussy?" said Tom Merry.

"I meant to keep it a deep, dark secret, deah boy. It's a standin' joke in the School House that I can never keep a secret; but I kept this one all right. Even that spyin' beast Twimble doesn't know that my patah is comin'."

"Who's coming on this jaunt besides ourselves?" asked Manners.

"My'minah will have to come, as a mattach of course. The cah will hold eight, at a tight squeeze. My patah's not bringin' the chauffeur. He's drivin' himself."

"Then there will be no room for two more," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus' brow was furrowed in thought.

"I should like to bring Blake an' Hewies an' Digby, an' Cardew an' Clive, an' Figgin's & Co. of the New House," he mused.

"Rather a tall order, to squeeze about a dozen fellows into two seats!" chuckled Monty Lowther.

"If it were a motor-bus, it would be a case of 'Let 'em all come!'" said Tom Merry. "But as it's a fouring-car, it can't be done. The disappointed ones will have to be given a look-in another time."

"That's so, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "As there are only two places to fill, I think I'll invite Talbot an' Miss Mawie."

"Good!" said Manners. "You couldn't do better—and you might do a jolly sight worse! Talbot's one of the

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best. And no picnic's complete without Miss Marie."

At that moment Wally D'Arcy burst into the dormitory.

"Oh, hero you are, Gussy!" he said. "Thought you'd lost yourself—fallen through the coal-hole, or something."

"Weally, Wally—"

"I've arranged about the other places in the car," said D'Arcy minor blandly. "Eh?"

"I've invited Curly Gibson, and Jameson, and Joe Frayne, and Manners minor—"

Arthur Augustus gasped.

"Bai Jove! Then you can jolly well disinvite them at once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wally D'Arcy looked defiant.

"I don't see why you should always be allowed to select our guests, Gussy," he said.

Arthur Augustus surveyed his minor sternly through his monocle.

"As your eldah bwothah, Wally—" he began.

"Oh, cut it out! It's bad enough to have a freak like you for a major without your rubbing it in!"

The Terrible Three chuckled. But Arthur Augustus did not join in their merriment. He advanced towards his refractory minor with the intention of administering well-merited correction.

At that moment, however, the toot of a motor-horn sounded in the quadrangle.

"His lordship has arrived!" said Monty Lowther.

"I'll go and fetch my pals!" exclaimed Wally D'Arcy.

"You will do nothin' of the sort, you young wascal!" said Arthur Augustus.

"I have already invited these three fellows to the picnic. P'raps you would be good enough to go an' invite Talbot and Miss Marie, dear boys, while I go down an' greet the patah?"

"All serene," said Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three hurried round to the sanatorium, where they found Talbot in conversation with Marie Rivers, the school nurse.

Monty Lowther made a sweeping bow. "Your ladyship—my lord. The carriage waits!" he announced.

Marie smiled.

"Would you mind telling us what you are talking about?" she inquired.

"Lord Eastwood's giving a picnic," explained Tom Merry, "and you two have been invited."

"Buck up," said Manners. "Car's waiting in the quad."

"How ripping!" said Talbot. "We were just discussing what to do with ourselves this afternoon, and this solves the merry problem."

"D'Arcy is a brick!" said Marie, with enthusiasm.

The party went down into the quad, and Lord Eastwood extended them a cheery greeting.

"Jump in!" he said. "Arthur and Wally have gone to the tuckshop to make the necessary purchases."

"We'll go and give them a hand," said Tom Merry.

When the juniors arrived at the little shop under the elms, they found Dame Taggles in quite a fluster.

Arthur Augustus had laid a fire-proof note on the counter, and he was rapping out orders at an amazing rate.

"A wabbit-pie, a tin of peaches, a tin of pineapple, four cakes—three cuxwant an' two seed—"

"Gussy's arithmetic's a bit shaky," observed Monty Lowther. "He's just discovered that three and two make four!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

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Dame Taggles bustled about in great haste, and the various articles were dumped upon the counter. Wailing hands seized them, and conveyed them to the car.

Arthur Augustus continued to give orders until the five had been expended. Then he borrowed a set of cutlery from Dame Taggles, and rejoined the others, who had clambered into the car.

It was a tight squeeze, for the provisions took up a good deal of room. But nobody seemed to mind.

Arthur Augustus caused some confusion by seating himself in a basket of eggs, which had been placed on the seat. But Monty Lowther consoled him with the reflection that he had only broken four. And those four were adhering to Gussy's trousers. As the swell of St. Jim's was unable to obtain a back view of himself, however, he failed to notice the extent of the damage.

"Wight away, patah!" he exclaimed. "And the car, with its cargo of happy passengers, moved forward in the direction of the school gateway."

CHAPTER 2.

Dark Forebodings.

MANY envious glances followed Lord Eastwood's car as it sped through the sunny quadrangle.

Curly Gibson & Co. were naturally disappointed at not making the excursion. But they realised that D'Arcy minor had had no authority to invite them; and they were consoled by Lord Eastwood's promise that he would take them some other time.

"This is prime!" murmured Monty Lowther, leaning back against the upholstery.

"Simply glorious!" said Manners.

"Enjoying it, Miss Marie?"

"No need to ask!" said Marie.

"I think you would enjoy it bettah, Miss Marie, if I swopped places with Talbot, an' sat next to you!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Rats," said Talbot. "Stay where you are, Gussy, and for goodness' sake take your foot out of the egg-basket! You've done enough damage as it is!"

"He's busted four, and he's trying to hatch four more with his boot!" said Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am already beginnin' to wegwet havin' invited you, Lowthah!" said Arthur Augustus reprovingly. "Your remarks are on a pah with your personal appearance. They are wevotin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A rather heated discussion ensued, in the course of which Arthur Augustus threatened to eject Monty Lowther from the car.

"Spare me, Gussy!" implored the humorist of the Shell. "I don't want my remains to be sent home to my sorrowing parents in a matchbox!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It would certainly have been a serious matter for Monty Lowther had he been pitched out of the car, for it was travelling at a rare speed. But Arthur Augustus had no serious intention of strewing the roadway with little pieces of Lowther. The party were in high spirits. Talbot and Marie Rivers, in particular, were enjoying the excursion.

And then a little incident occurred which seemed to throw a damper on Marie's gaiety.

A powerfully-built, coarse-looking man was lurching along the road in front of the oncoming car.

Lord Eastwood sounded his horn, but the pedestrian did not heed. He continued to stumble along in the middle of the roadway.

"Confound that fellow!" muttered Tom Merry. "Why can't he get out of the way?"

"Looks as if he's the worse for drink!" observed Manners.

"P'raps he's deaf," suggested Monty Lowther. "Let's give him a shout."

The voices of the juniors rang out in chorus.

"Hi! Look out!"

The coarse-looking man stepped to one side, though he seemed in no hurry about it, and the car swept past.

The incident was promptly forgotten, save by Marie Rivers.

Marie's face was pale. The merry sparkle had faded from her eyes. She leaned forward, and clutched Talbot by the arm.

"Toff!" she murmured, in a low tone.

"Did you see that man?"

"The fellow we passed just now?" said Talbot lightly. "Of course! Why do you ask, Marie?"

"Did you recognise him?"

Talbot shook his head. "I didn't see his face, and I didn't particularly want to," he said. "The merchant looked like a tramp."

"Toff! I—I believe—I'm almost certain—that it was Jim Dawlish!"

The name seemed to electrify Talbot. He shot bolt upright in his seat.

"Dawlish!" he ejaculated. "Are you sure of that, Marie?"

"If it wasn't Dawlish, then it was his double."

"My hat!"

Talbot looked very grave.

The presence of Jim Dawlish in the neighbourhood of St. Jim's spelt trouble. Dawlish was the leader of a gang of cracksmen, and he was emphatically not a nice person to know.

It was Dawlish who had once kidnapped Marie Rivers, with a view to inducing her to join his rascally gang. It was Dawlish who had been caught red-handed in the act of rifling the Head's safe at St. Jim's. For that outrage he had served a term of imprisonment; and he was now free once more to carry on his nefarious work.

Dawlish belonged to the muscular rather than the brainy class of criminal. He lacked the cleverness and polish which had characterised the exploits of John Rivers, who at one time had been the most dangerous cracksmen in the country, and who now, by a strange turn of fate, was an official at Scotland Yard.

Marie's father, in the days when he had followed a dishonourable calling, had displayed wonderful cunning, and an almost breathless daring. And Jim Dawlish was a clumsy yokel by comparison.

All the same, Dawlish was a dangerous man—a man without scruple—a man who genuinely believed that dishonesty was the best policy. He had served his country in time of war; he had fought with distinction through the fierce campaigns in Flanders; and on being demobilised he had had a shot at going straight. Employers had closed their doors upon him, however, and at length, in desperation, he had reverted to his old calling—that of a cracksmen and a lawbreaker.

Unless Marie's vision had deceived her, Dawlish was now lurking in the locality of the school. And he meant mischief. There could be no doubt of that. He was not frequenting that part of Sussex for the benefit of his health. It was quite on the cards that he intended to make yet another attempt to persuade Talbot and Marie Rivers to become members of his gang. Or he was possibly contemplating a burglary, either at St. Jim's itself, or at one of the big country houses in the vicinity.

Talbot's hands were tightly clenched. Dark premonitions gathered in his mind.



"Can you give me a description of the raskil wot stole it?" asked Mr. Crump. "No. But I can give you a description of the car. It was a Superb four-seater, painted red on the outside, and the number was A.A. 04486," replied Lord Eastwood. (See chapter 3.)

For his own safety he was not concerned; but to ensure the safety of the girl who was seated at his side he would have gone through fire and water.

"I don't like this, Marie," he muttered.

"Nor I, Toff!"

"If that was really Dawlish, we ought to go back for him, and give him marching orders. I'll ask Lord Eastwood—"

"No, no, Toff!" Marie laid a detaining hand on the junior's arm. "I wasn't sure—I may have been mistaken. The car shot by so quickly that I only had a fleeting glimpse of the man."

"Let's hope you were deceived, Marie," said Talbot.

But in his heart he felt that Marie had been right—that the fellow lurching along the road had, indeed, been Jim Dawlish.

"Heh we are, deah boys—an' gal!"

The cheery voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy roused Talbot and Marie from their gloomy meditations.

Lord Eastwood had run the car into the wood as far as possible, and he halted it at the entrance to a leafy glade.

"This is a topping place for a picnic!" said Monty Lowther. "In the days of my youth I quaffed many a bottle of stone ginger in this retreat. I saw a duel here once, too."

"A duel!" said Lord Eastwood, in surprise. "Do you mean with swords?"

"No; it was an eating duel. The contestants were Billy and Bessie Bunter. They had a competition to see who could devour the biggest number of doughnuts, and it ended in a dead-heat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It was a win for Bessie, really," continued Lowther. "She scoffed six more doughnuts than Billy; but Billy put half a dozen in his pockets when Bessie wasn't looking. I shall never forget that little episode. Billy had to get back to Greyfriars, and Bessie to Cliff House—and neither of them could walk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come along, you fellows!" said Wally D'Arcy. "Help me unload these things! I'm doing to make a start!"

"Wally, Wally!" said Arthur Augustus. "Your goodliness is only exceeded by your impudence!"

Wally sniffed.

"I don't go about smashing eggs, anyway!" he retorted. "You busted four—and they were new-laid, too! Dame Taggies assured us they hadn't been in stock more than a fortnight!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eggs are off!" said Manners.

"In more senses than one!" chuckled Tom Merry. "We sha'n't be able to have any."

"How's that, deah boy?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"We've brought nothing to cook 'em or fry 'em in."

"Oh crumbs!" said Talbot. "Never mind!" said Talbot. "There are heaps of other things. Give me a hand with this crate of ginger-pop, somebody!"

A large tablecloth was spread out on the grass in the glade, and the good things were set out in tempting array.

The feasters departed themselves on the grass, or on tree-stumps, and Lord Eastwood jovially presided over the festivities.

"You must regard me as one of yourselves this afternoon," he said. "I'll even go so far as to talk your own language. Pile in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The picnickers needed no second bidding. They were hungry, and they did full justice to the provisions.

Talbot and Marie Rivers entered into the proceedings with zest. Indeed, Marie was the life and soul of the party.

Little did the others dream that her gaiety was forced—that it was a mask to conceal the dark forebodings which filled her mind.

Marie dispensed smiles and laughter to all. But Talbot knew that her cheerfulness was assumed—that she shared his own premonitions of impending calamity.

The probability that Jim Dawlish was in the neighbourhood had robbed that picnic of its enjoyment—so far as Talbot and Marie were concerned, at any rate.

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What game was Dawlish playing?
What fresh piece of villainy was now being hatched?
Talbot and his girl chum were soon to learn!

CHAPTER 3.

The Vanishing Trick.

"I SUPPOSE the cah's safe, patah?"
It was Arthur Augustus who asked the question.

"Of course, my boy!" said Lord Eastwood. "Why should you think otherwise?"

"It stunk me that some wascal might collah it."

Lord Eastwood laughed.
"If that were the case, we should hardly fail to hear the engine being started up," he said.

"Gussy's always worrying about something," observed Monty Lowther. "He'll be bemoaning the loss of his topper next."

Arthur Augustus gave a hasty glance round. He expected to see his topper reposing on the grass. But it was not visible.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jun's. "I've mislaid my toppah, deah boys!"

There was a chuckle from the easters.
"Lowthah, you wotbah? Have you appowvated my headgeah?"

"Search me!" said Monty Lowther, turning out his pockets.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My toppah is missin'—"

"You left it in the car, you frabjous chump!" said Tom Merry.

"I should advise you to go and retrieve it, in case some tramp gets hold of it," said Manners.

Arthur Augustus rose to his feet and hurried away. He was absent a couple of minutes, and when he returned he was fairly quivering with excitement.

"Found it?" asked Talbot.

"No, deah boy. I—"

"Surely it's the ear?" said Lord Eastwood.

"Vewy likely, patah. But—"

"What are you butting about, ass?" demanded Tom Merry.

"The cahs not theah!"

"What?"

Had Arthur Augustus suddenly exploded a bombshell, the confusion could not have been greater.

Lord Eastwood jumped to his feet, and the other members of the party followed suit. They blinked incredulously at the swell of St. Jun's.

"The—the car's not there, Gussy?" stutted Manners.

"No!"

"You must have forgotten where we left it," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"I remembah the place quite well," he said. "But the cah's not theah. It's vanished!"

"Nonsense, Arthur!" said Lord Eastwood.

And he led the way towards the spot where the car had been left. A moment later he uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"You are right, Arthur! The car has disappeared."

"My only aunt!"

"Spirited away, by Jove!"

The party halted on the leafy path at the entrance to the glade. They looked this way and that way, but there was no sign of the car.

"This—this is most singular!" gasped Lord Eastwood. "Either the car has been removed for a practical joke, or it has been stolen!"

At the suggestion of theft Marie Rivers caught Talbot's arm.

"Jim Dawlish is responsible for this, Tom!" he murmured.

Talbot nodded without speaking. He was quite convinced now that the man who had been overtaken on the road was Jim Dawlish. He was equally convinced that Dawlish had appropriated Lord Eastwood's car as noiselessly as possible when the picnic was at its height.

"This is a jolly queer bizney!" said Tom Merry.

"I'm inclined to think it's a jape," said Manners.

But Talbot dismissed this theory.

"It's a case of car-stealing, right enough," he said. "Some scoundrel has been here and collared it!"

Talbot did not mention the name of the particular scoundrel he suspected; but he and Marie had a growing conviction that Jim Dawlish was at the bottom of the business.

"We must make a search," said Lord Eastwood briskly. "And if the search proves futile, I must place the matter in the hands of the police."

The picnicers dispersed in two directions, and they carried out a thorough and systematic search for the missing car. They were not hopeful of finding it, but they meant to leave no stone unturned.

"Here are the tracks!" sang out Monty Lowther at length.

"You're sure they're not the tracks we made in comin', deah boy?" said Arthur Augustus.

"Positive! There are two distinct tracks here."

"Quite right, Sherlock Holmes!" said Wally D'Arcy. "Wonder where the trail leads to?"

"We'll soon see," said Tom Merry.

And the juniors proceeded along the footpath. They kept the tracks in view until the footpath joined the road; and here they were stumped.

On the hard surface of the roadway numerous tracks were intermingled. It was quite impossible to tell in which direction Lord Eastwood's car had gone.

"This is the absolute limit!" said Tom Merry. "Afraid your pater will have to say good-bye to his car, Gussy."

"It's a jolly valuable one, isn't it?" said Lowther.

Arthur Augustus nodded.

"My patah gave fifteen hundred pounds for it," he said.

"Phew!"

The juniors stood in a group in the roadway discussing the alarming situation, and they were presently reinforced by Lord Eastwood, Talbot, Marie Rivers, and Manners.

"We've followed the tracks up to this point," said Manners.

Monty Lowther looked witheringly at his chum.

"My dear ass," he said, "we discovered those same tracks ages ago."

"It's impossible to trace them beyond this," said Tom Merry.

Lord Eastwood looked grim.

"I must report the matter at once to the police," he said, "though I fear that the thief is many miles away by now. For all we know, over an hour has elapsed since the car was stolen. I hoped, at first, that it had been removed for a joke; but that is a delusion which I can entertain no longer. Obviously, this is the work of a thief."

"We'll come with you to the police-station, patah," said Arthur Augustus.

And the party set off in the direction of the village.

The fat and pompous P.-c. Crump looked more fat and pompous than ever as the procession trooped into the little station.

"You wish to give somebody in charge, sir?" he said to Lord Eastwood.

"Don't talk nonsense, man! My car has been stolen!"

"My heye!"

"It was left on the main footpath in Wayland Woods, whilst we had a picnic, and—"

"Which you have no right to drive a car along that there footpath, sir!" said P.-c. Crump. "It's a marvel to me that you wasn't all pitched out. That path's too narrah for hortermobiles—"

"The path is not the only thing that suffers from narrowness," said Lord Eastwood drily. "Your own mind seems to be similarly afflicted. Instead of criticising my actions, I wish you would interest yourself in the loss of my car!"

Mr. Crump became somewhat subdued.

"You say the car was stole, sir?"

"Yes!"

"Can you give me a description of the raskil wot stole it?"

"No. But I can give you a description of the car. It is a 'Superb'—four-seater—latest model—painted in red on the outside, and upholstered in black. The number is A.A.04486."

P.-c. Crump scribbled away industriously in his notebook.

"A.A. did you say, sir?"

"Ay, ay!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've omitted to tell Mr. Crump the most important thing of all, patah," said Arthur Augustus.

"Namely?" said Lord Eastwood.

"That the cah contained a silk toppah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"A magnificent, brand-new topper," said Monty Lowther, "painted on the outside in black, and upholstered in pale blue and pink—"

"Lowthah, you ass—"

"The loss of your top-hat is of small moment, Arthur," said Lord Eastwood.

"But it was a wonderful hat, patah—a perfect fit—"

"The very sight of it was enough to give anybody a perfect fit!" murmured Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Any more details about the car, sir?" inquired Mr. Crump, looking up from his notebook.

Lord Eastwood shook his head.

"You have sufficient information to be able to identify the car," he said.

"I shall expect you to set in prompt communication with the police at Wayland and Burchester, and notify them of my loss. I need hardly add that if you are successful in recovering the car you shall have an adequate reward."

Mr. Crump grinned. He did not anticipate a great deal of difficulty in tracking down the stolen car. But the juniors had little faith in the powers of the portly constable.

Monty Lowther declared, sotto voce, that Mr. Crump was incapable of tracking down a tame rabbit.

"Are you comin' back with us to the school, patah?" inquired Arthur Augustus.

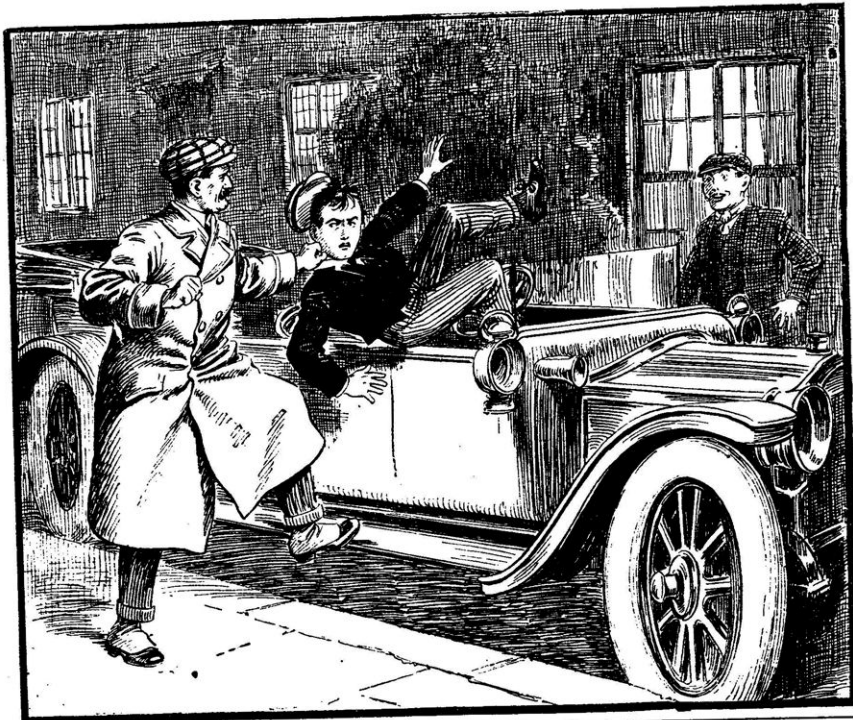
"No, my boy. I must be getting home."

"You'll go by twain?"

"No. I will charter a car from the local garage."

Lord Eastwood did so. He shook hands all round with the members of the picnic-party, and took his departure in a hired car. He had left instructions with P.-c. Crump to communicate with him at once in the event of the missing car being brought to light.

Feeling rather dispirited, Arthur



The man in the motoring-coat emitted a queer sort of gurgle. Then a grip of iron descended upon the collar of George Alfred Grundy, and he was hoisted out of the car on to the pavement. "Boy, how dare you tax me with the theft of my own car!" exclaimed the indignant motorist. (See chapter 4.)

Augustus and his chums set off in the direction of St. Jim's.

"I should like to have five minutes with the merchant who collared that car!" growled Manners.

"Same hero!" said Tom Merry. "We may get to grips with him yet!" "It's a vevy wemote possibility, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus. "The boundah's miles away by now!"

But Talbot and Marie Rivers did not share D'Arcy's opinion. They inclined to the belief that Jim Dawlish had found a convenient hiding-place for the car, and was still lurking in the locality of St. Jim's.

"There's trouble ahead, Marie," said Talbot gravely. "To my mind, the theft of the car is merely the beginning of a whole series of thefts. We shall have to keep our eyes open, and if we happen to spot that precious scoundrel—"

Talbot did not finish the sentence. But there was an expression on his face which boded ill for Jim Dawlish.

CHAPTER 4.

A Very Amateur Detective.

WHEN the party got back to the school, and related the events of the afternoon, there was great excitement.

All sorts of conjectures were put forward concerning the missing car. And Grundy of the Shell, who rather fancied

himself in the capacity of a detective, joyfully informed his schoolfellows that he intended to take up the case.

Grundy obtained full particulars of the car from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and he went out that evening with the avowed intention of clearing the matter up. He carefully studied every car that passed him on the road; and in one or two instances he stopped and cross-examined the drivers, greatly to their annoyance.

Finally, Grundy discovered the very car he sought. It was standing unoccupied outside the Conservative Club in Rycombe.

The amateur detective could scarcely contain his delight.

"This is the car, right enough!" he chortled. "Red outside, and upholstered in black. I forget what number Gussy said it was; but the number's a mere detail. I'm positive this is Lord Eastwood's car!"

So saying, Grundy clambered into the driver's seat, with the intention of waiting until the individual who had been driving the car appeared on the scene.

Half an hour elapsed, and dusk descended over the surrounding countryside. But Grundy stuck to his seat with Job-like patience, and was eventually rewarded by the sight of a tall man in a motoring-coat.

The man emerged from the Conservative Club, and advanced towards the

car. He uttered a sharp exclamation when he caught sight of the junior who was perched in the front seat.

"Pon my soul!"

Grundy stood up. There was a grim expression on his rugged face.

"I want to ask you a few pertinent questions, my man!" he said sharply.

"Indeed! You're sure you don't mean a few impertinent ones?"

Somehow, the speaker's voice seemed familiar to Grundy; but in the uncertain light he was unable to identify the man's features.

"How did you come by this car?"

"Eh?"

"I have reason to believe that you pinched it!"

"What?"

"This car is the property of Lord Eastwood. And unless you can give me a satisfactory explanation as to how it came into your possession, I shall haul you over to the police!"

The man in the motoring-coat emitted a queer sort of gurgle. Then a grip of iron descended upon the collar of George Alfred Grundy, and he was hoisted out of the car and on to the pavement.

"Boy! How dare you tax me with the theft of my own car! How dare you threaten me with police proceedings!"

The voice seemed more familiar than

ever; and Grundy became conscious of a shivering sensation in his spine.

"Who—who are you?" he faltered. "I am Mr. Glyn, of Glyn House!" Grundy recoiled with a start.

The person he had threatened to place under arrest was none other than Bernard Glyn's father!

The great George Alfred realised that he was on the wrong track—very much so! It was inconceivable that Mr. Glyn, who was a J.P. and a highly-respected man, should have stolen Lord Eastwood's car.

"I—I'm sorry, sir," stammered Grundy. "Erratically sorry, in fact!"

"So you think I have stolen this car—what?"

"Nunno!" "And you contemplate handing me over to the police?"

Grundy looked utterly abashed.

"It was all a mistake, sir," he muttered. "I—I didn't know who you were, and I—I sort of jumped to conclusions."

"You are an amazingly stupid boy!" said Mr. Glyn, though his tone was more kindly now. "Jump in, and I'll give you a lift as far as the school."

"Thanks awfully, sir," said Grundy gratefully. "And, honour bright, I'm over so sorry—"

"Not another word!" said Bernard Glyn's father. And he chattered quite affably to George Alfred Grundy as the car sped along in the direction of St. Jim's.

Grundy resolved to keep his own counsel concerning the events of that evening. If his schoolfellows got to know that he had unwittingly apprehended Mr. Glyn, and taxed him with the theft of Lord Eastwood's car, they would never let him hear the end of it.

"You—you won't tell Bernard about my idiotic blunder, sir?" faltered Grundy, as the car came to a halt outside the school gates.

Mr. Glyn smiled. "I shan't breathe a word about it," he promised. "Good-night, my boy!" "Good-night, sir!"

Mr. Glyn drove away, and Grundy paused in the school gateway and glanced at his watch.

It was past locking-up time, yet the gates still remained open.

Taggles, the porter, was not devoting that strict attention to "dooty" which he always prided himself upon.

"The silly chump!" muttered Grundy. "He'll go getting into hot water with the Head! The gates ought to have been locked twenty minutes ago."

So saying, Grundy stepped up to the door of the lodge, and applied his knuckles to it.

There was no response.

Grundy knocked again, loudly and insistently. He expected to hear the shuffling footsteps of Taggles. But no sound came from within.

With an exclamation of impatience, Grundy crossed to the window, and peeped into the little parlour.

Taggles the porter was reclining in the armchair, with his feet resting on the table. He was sound asleep.

On the mantelpiece was a suspicious-looking bottle. Taggles had evidently been nibbling rather freely of the juice of the juniper.

Grundy went back to the door, and opened it. Then he marched into the parlour, and shook the slumbering porter.

"Taggy, you duffer! Wake up!"

Taggles opened his eyes, and blinked drowsily at the intruder.

"Gerraway, you young warmint!" he growled.

Grundy gave a snort.

"It's past locking-up time, you fool!" he exclaimed. "Pull yourself together! If the Head or one of the masters finds the gates still open, it'll mean the order of the boot for you!"

Taggles rose rather unsteadily to his feet. He groped on the mantelpiece for his keys and for his pipe; and such was his confusion that he came within an ace of putting the keys in his mouth and attempting to lock the gates with his pipe.

"Buck up, Taggy!" said Grundy. "And I should advise you to take a little more water with it in future!"

Taggles locked the gates, and glared at Grundy.

"Are you insinuating that I'm not sober?" he said thickly.

"Dry up! And get inside—quick!" rapped out Grundy. "Here comes Railton!"

Taggles had the good sense to retire into his lodge, and Grundy made his way towards the school building. He halted as Mr. Railton hailed him through the gloom.

"Grundy! You are very late!"

"Sorry, sir. I've been on the track of Lord Eastwood's car."

"In that case," said the Housemaster, "I will take no action in the matter. Have you been able to discover anything of importance?"

"No, sir."

Grundy did not enlighten Mr. Railton on the subject of his skirmish with Mr. Glyn.

"That is unfortunate," said the Housemaster. "I am afraid Lord Eastwood must resign himself to the loss of his car. It is unlikely that the police will be successful in tracking it down. Good-night, my boy!"

"Good-night, sir!"

And master and junior went their separate ways.

CHAPTER 5.

A Case for Scotland Yard.

EARLY next morning Mr. Railton paid a visit to the Head's study. Dr. Holmes was looking pale and agitated.

"Come in, Railton," he said. "You wish to speak to me?"

"Yes, sir. You are aware, of course, of the theft of Lord Eastwood's touring-car?"

The Head nodded.

"It is a very serious matter," he said. "I agree with you, sir," said Mr. Railton. "And I think it only right that I should inform you of what I have seen."

The Head darted a questioning glance at the young Housemaster.

"Yesterday afternoon, prior to the theft of the car, I was taking a stroll in the vicinity of Weyland, and I encountered that scoundrel Dawlish!"

"Bless my soul!"

"I had hoped," continued Mr. Railton, "that we had seen the last of the fellow. But he evidently has no intention of quitting this neighbourhood, which seems to serve as a happy hunting-ground for his dishonourable exploits."

"Did you enter into conversation with the rascal?"

"I warned him that unless he got clear of the district immediately he would be given into custody. He assured me that he was now going straight; but that is a statement which I cannot bring myself to believe. In fact, I cannot help connecting Dawlish with the theft of Lord Eastwood's car. I am confident that it was stolen by him, or by one of his accomplices."

"I am of the same opinion, Railton," said the Head. "And I am equally convinced that it was Dawlish who carried out the burglary last night."

"The—the burglary?" stammered Mr. Railton.

"Yes. My study has been broken into and my safe rifled."

"Good heavens!"

"Curiously enough, my own property has not been tampered with," the Head went on. "But a number of War Bonds, of the gross value of eight hundred pounds, have been stolen. I was holding the Bonds in trust for Koumi Rao, the Indian junior; and the knowledge that they have been made away with is most distracting."

"You astonish me, sir!" said Mr. Railton. "I had no idea that a burglary of this nature had been committed."

"I did not know myself until a few moments ago, when I had occasion to go to my safe. The theft of the Bonds is a matter of great gravity; and I desire, if possible, to have the case investigated, and the Bonds restored, without Koumi Rao's knowledge."

"Then you will have to engage a detective, sir."

"Exactly! If the Bonds are not recovered in the course of a few days, then I shall have to explain the facts to Koumi Rao—a far from pleasant task!"

Mr. Railton was inclined to take a hopeful view of the situation.

"I see no reason why the matter should not be cleared up, sir," he said.

"It is, of course, a task far beyond the powers of the local police, who appear to me to be a set of incompetent dolts. But if John Rivers were engaged—"

"John Rivers?"

The Housemaster nodded.

"He is now a Scotland Yard official, and, moreover, a man of exceptional skill and ability. He has himself led a life of crime in the past—all honour to him for having conquered his criminal

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tendencies—and he is the one man whom I should select to deal with Dawlish, with whose methods he is familiar. Do not think I am trying to dictate to you, sir. I merely throw out the suggestion—"

"You are right, Railton," said the Head. "John Rivers is far and away the most competent man to be entrusted with this case."

"It is more than possible that he will be successful in clearing up the affair of Lord Eastwood's car, in addition to the matter of the War Bonds," said Mr. Railton.

The Head nodded.

"I will get into touch with him at once," he said.

And, stepping to the telephone, he took off the receiver.

"I want Scotland Yard, please," he said to the operator.

"Excuse me, sir, but there's no such place in Rylcombe."

The Head sighed wearily. Telephones and telephone operators did more to ruffle his feelings than anything else.

"My dear young lady, I am perfectly aware that Scotland Yard is not a local institution," said Dr. Holmes. "It is situated in London."

"In that case, sir, it will be a trunk call. If you will hang on for an hour or so—"

"I will do nothing of the sort," said the Head tartly. "Kindly notify me as soon as the call comes through!"

"Oh, all right!" said the operator cheerfully. "Keep your hair on!"

The Head replaced the receiver with a frown.

"There is no limit to the impertinence of these operators!" he exclaimed. "I have just been requested to keep my hair on."

Mr. Railton repressed a smile with great difficulty.

"Shall I wait, sir, until the call comes through?" he inquired.

"No. Perhaps you would be good enough to look in in two hours' time," said the Head.

The operator informed me that the call would be through in an hour. It will be quite safe to multiply her estimate by two."

Mr. Railton retired. And when, a couple of hours later, he re-entered the study, he heard the telephone-bell clang.

"Ah! You've returned at just the right moment, Railton," said the Head, advancing to the telephone. "Are you there?"

A voice replied in the affirmative.

"I am the headmaster of St. James' School," said Dr. Holmes, with dignity.

"I wish you to take up a case—"

"Sorry," was the reply. "Too busy!"

The Head frowned.

"You have no right to address me in that curt manner!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, ring off!"

"I refuse to ring off! I insist upon your taking up this case—"

"We can't take up any more cases just now. We've got our hands full."

"But this is a most urgent and important matter. It concerns the theft of a number of War Bonds, to say nothing of the disappearance of a touring-car belonging—"

"What!"

A startled exclamation came over the wire.

"Ah! I thought I should succeed in impressing you with the gravity of the situation," said the Head. "I desire you to send Mr. John Rivers—"

"Eh?"

"To take up this case without delay."

"I'm afraid, guv'nor," said the voice

at the other end, "you've got on to the wrong shopp."

"Bless my soul! Surely I am in communication with Scotland Yard?"

"No fear!"

"Then who—who are you?"

"Shickford's, the furniture removers."

"Oh!"

The Head nearly collapsed.

"We certainly take up cases," continued the voice, "but not the sort of cases you mean."

With his disengaged hand the Head took out his pocket-handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"Oh, dear! These telephone operators seem to make it their special mission in life to put subscribers on to the wrong numbers," he gasped. "I am sorry you have been troubled—"

"Bless your sorrow!" came the impatient retort.

And the person at the other end rang off.

The Head replaced the receiver on its hooks and sank limply into a chair.

"I shall seriously consider the advisability of having my telephone disconnected!" he exclaimed.

"Would you like me to endeavour to get through to Scotland Yard, sir?" asked Mr. Railton.

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"Where I have failed it is hardly likely that you would succeed," he said.

"I will communicate with John Rivers by letter. That seems the only satisfactory way."

"I suggest, sir," said the Housemaster, "that you request John Rivers to come here in the capacity of a temporary gate-porter."

"Excellent! But what of Taggles?"

"He will not be averse to taking a brief rest," said Mr. Railton, with a smile.

Accordingly, the Head sent for the school porter.

It was with considerable trepidation that Taggles made his way to the Head's study. He wondered if Dr. Holmes had got to hear of his neglect of duty overnight.

The grave expression on the Head's face was anything but reassuring.

"Come in, Taggles!" he said.

The porter shuffled into the study.

"Which it's an 'evening mornin', sir!" he ventured.

The Head frowned.

"I have not sent for you in order to discuss the weather, Taggles. I wish to ask you a question. Did you see or hear anything unusual last evening?"

"Nunno, sir."

"Taggles was scarcely in a condition to see or hear anything," interposed Mr. Railton. "He was twenty minutes late in locking the gates, and when that duty was fulfilled he returned to his armchair and went to sleep. Is not that correct, Taggles?"

"Ahem! The—the fact is, I ain't bin at all well lately, sir," said Taggles, turning to the Head. "I believe I've got, that there sleepin'-sickness comin' on."

"Nonsense!" said Dr. Holmes sharply.

"I am of opinion that your drowsiness was caused by an excessive consumption of strong liquor."

"Which I never touched a drop, sir!" said Taggles, earnestly but untruthfully.

"I can't stand the sight or the smell of spirits."

"But you are not averse to the taste of them, apparently," said Mr. Railton drily.

"Wot I says is this 'ere—"

"I think, Taggles," said the Head, "that you had better go away for a few days, for a rest and change."

Taggles brightened up considerably.

"That's werry kind of you, sir. I always did say as 'ow you was a good-natured sort, in spite of wot some people—"

"Taggles!"

"Which I'm certain a rest and change would do me all the good in the world—thank you kindly, sir!"

The Head could not refrain from smiling.

"Have you any relatives with whom you can stay for a few days, Taggles?"

"Yessir; my mother's still alive. She's a centurian—"

"A—what?" gasped the Head.

"Taggles evidently means a centenarian, sir," said Mr. Railton, smiling.

"I see. Very well, Taggles, you may make the necessary arrangements, and leave as soon as you wish."

Taggles again launched into a long-winded expression of thanks, but the Head cut him short.

"That will do, Taggles. You may go!"

And the porter went, feeling greatly relieved at the fact that he had not been called over the coals, and rejoicing in the prospect of a holiday which he considered he richly deserved.

CHAPTER 6.

Nipped in the Bud!

WHEN the Head had written and sealed the letter to John Rivers, he sent for Toby, the page.

"I want you to go to the post-office in the village, and despatch this letter by express post," said Dr. Holmes.

"Yessir!"

"It is most important communication, and must be posted without delay."

"Werry good, sir!"

The Head handed over the letter, and Toby took his departure.

He had barely proceeded a hundred yards when he encountered a powerfully-built man, who was pacing to and fro in the lane.

The man nodded genially to Toby, and his keen gaze alighted on the letter in the page's hand.

"Jim Dawlish—for it was he—gave a perceptible start when he caught sight of the address.

"John Rivers, Esq., New Scotland Yard, London, S.W."

In an instant, however, Dawlish regained his composure.

The scoundrel's brain was working swiftly.

"At all costs he must gain possession of that letter."

"Say, kid," he remarked, "are you the page-boy up at the school?"

Toby nodded.

"Well, I wonder if you'd mind cutting back an' tellin' Master Talbot that I want to speak to him?"

"No time!" said Toby briefly. "I've got to get to the post-office with this letter. The 'ead says it's most important."

"It won't take you a minute to nip back to the school," said Dawlish persuasively. "Here's half-a-crown for your trouble!"

Toby became obliging at once.

"Right you are!" he said, pocketing the coin. "Wot name shall I give Master Talbot?"

"Smith. Tell him Mr. Smith would like a word with him. An', while you're gone," added Dawlish, as if struck by a sudden inspiration, "I'll pop down to the village an' post that letter for you."

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Toby hesitated. And, while he hesitated, Dawlish whisked the letter out of his hand, and set off along the lane.

"I've got longer legs than you," he called back over his shoulder. "An' I'll have this letter posted in next to no time! Ask Master Talbot to wait for me here."

Toby was not best pleased at the cool manner in which the stranger had dismissed him of the letter. But he had no suspicion that the man's intentions were dishonourable, and he hurried away towards the school.

Jim Dawlish disappeared in the direction of the village. But he never got there. At a deserted part of the lane he halted, and calmly ripped open the communication which was intended for John Rivers.

Dawlish perused the letter with a chuckle.

"So this is the little game, is it?" he muttered. "John Rivers is to come to the school disguised as a gate-porter, with a view to 'tricking' me down. H'm! I fancy it will be a jolly sight safer for me if Rivers stays at Scotland Yard."

So saying, Jim Dawlish stowed the letter away in his pocket, and strolled leisurely back towards St. Jim's.

He found Toby waiting for him by the school wall.

"Master Talbot can't come," said the page. "He's at lessons. If you care to wait, he'll see you afterwards."

"Tell him I was unable to wait. I had another engagement to keep," said Dawlish.

He had known very well that Talbot would not leave the Shell Form-room for the purpose of holding an interview outside the school gates with an unknown person named Smith.

"All right," said Toby. "I'll tell 'im. By the way, did you post that letter?"

Dawlish nodded.

"Thanks!" said Toby. "You didn't lose much time," he added.

"I never do!" said Dawlish, rather firmly.

When Toby had taken his departure Jim Dawlish took a short cut, which brought him to the towing-path of the Rill. He negotiated the towing-path with rapid strides, and disappeared through the back entrance of the Green Man.

In the smoking-room of that disreputable hostelry sat a well-proportioned but dissipated-looking man—a man who, before he had forsaken an honourable calling for a dishonourable one, had been handsome and attractive.

Patrick Donovan had been an actor, and a man in the front rank of his profession. But he had lived far beyond his income, and had gone rapidly down-hill—so rapidly that he had now forsaken the footlights in order to become a member of Jim Dawlish's precious gang.

"Pat," said Jim Dawlish, as he stepped into the smoking-room, "there's a job of work to be done."

"Another one?" said Pat, raising his eyebrows. "Say, Jim, you seem to be goin' the pace just lately! You've made two jolly good hauls within the last twenty-four hours, an' now you're contemplan' another."

"Not so loud, man!" hissed Dawlish, raising a warning finger. "Walls have ears, you know!"

"Sorry," said Pat; "but, 'pon my word, I'm gettin' quite excited! What's the latest?"

Jim Dawlish produced the letter which he had intercepted, and handed it to his confederate.

"Read that!" he said.

Pat tossed off a tumbler of ginger-ale, strongly diluted with gin, then he focused his gaze on the letter.

"Say, how did you manage to get hold of this?" he exclaimed.

"I was lucky enough to spot the kid who'd been instructed to post it."

"I see. So they want to put John Rivers on our track—what? Well, it's not a bad move on their part!"

"Look here, Pat," said Dawlish, "you've got to take the title-role in this little drama!"

"What do you mean?"

"You must play the part of a gate-porter for a day or two."

"An' pass myself off to the school authorities as John Rivers?"

"That's it!"

"It's goin' to be difficult—"

"Not a bit of it! You'll be disguised, so nobody's to know that you're not John Rivers."

"But the Toff and Marie? It will be impossible to deceive those two!"

"You must keep out of their way."

Pat Donovan did not share his companion's enthusiasm for the enterprise.

"I'm inclined to think, Jim," he said, "that we've gone far enough. Dash it all, we've made a magnificent haul! First the car, which is stored in a safe place for the necessary alterations to be made. Then the War Bonds, which total eight hundred quid. That's pretty good goin'."

But I think it's temptin' Fate to remain in this district. It's time we changed our pitch."

Dawlish laughed harshly.

"We can afford to clear off just yet," he said. "Why man, there are some stunnin' silver cups an' things waitin' to be collared! It would be madness to let them slip through our fingers! An' if you go up to the school in the capacity of gate-porter, the thing will be dead easy! You can unlock the gates for me at midnight, an' we'll go after the loot together."

"Where is it kept?"

"In one of the wards in the sanatorium. The headmaster had it shipped there on the Q-T. He fancied I suspected that would be burglars would leave the sanatorium out of their calculations. It'll be a splendid haul, Pat! Some of those cups would fetch a hundred guineas!"

"But there are big risks—"

"My dear fellow, if our job was free of risks, everybody would be doin' it! As John Rivers used to say in the old days, 'He who takes no risks takes nothing else.' Of course, if you've got no stomach for the job, you've only to say the word, an' I'll pass it on to one of the others!"

The taunt nettled Pat Donovan.

"I'm not a funk, if that's what you mean," he said.

"Then you'll tackle the job?"

"Yes."

"Good man!" said Dawlish approvingly. "What about the disguise?"

"I think I've got some old theatrical props that'll answer the purpose."

"That's fine!"

Pat Donovan went upstairs. And when he returned to the smoking-room a quarter of an hour later, his appearance was completely transformed. His clothes were very similar to those worn by Taggles, and his ancient hat bore a remarkable resemblance to the school porter's.

"Wot I says is this 'ere, you young rips will be the death of me!" said Pat.

Dawlish gave a chuckle.

"You'll do!" he said. "You've got a double part to play. So far as the headmaster's concerned, you're John Rivers. An' so far as the kids are concerned, you're a temporary gate-porter. It's a job I shouldn't be clever enough to tackle myself. But you'll manage it all right."

Pat Donovan refilled his tumbler, and quaffed the contents, to fortify himself for his forthcoming interview with the

Head of St. Jim's. Then, nodding to Jim Dawlish, he quitted the smoking-room, and set off in the direction of the school.

CHAPTER 7.

Under False Colours!

AFTERNOON lessons were in progress when Pat Donovan arrived at St. Jim's.

Taggles, who was packing up in readiness to depart on his holiday, regarded the newcomer curiously.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Never mind who I am!" growled Donovan.

"Which you ain't got no right on these 'ere premises—"

"Hold your tongue!"

Taggles fairly gasped. He was not accustomed to being addressed in this manner by an individual who was, to all appearances, a paid manservant like himself.

"Look 'ere—" began Taggles threateningly.

But the newcomer had no more time to wait in conversation with the school-porter. He passed on, and made his way to the Head's study.

Dr. Holmes looked up in surprise at his unannounced visitor came in.

"Who—who are you?" he exclaimed.

"John Rivers," came the prompt reply. "At your service, sir!"

The Head's bewilderment vanished. He rose to his feet, and extended his hand to his visitor.

"You have lost no time in coming, Mr. Rivers. It is incredible that you should have received my letter so soon."

"It came by express post, sir. And, of course, I obeyed the summons immediately. Things are rather slack at the Yard just now, and I'm not sorry that this little job has turned up."

The Head regarded his visitor with admiration.

"Really, your disguise is perfect!" he exclaimed. "And your natural voice is disguised no less effectively than your person. It is wonderful!"

The bogus John Rivers laughed.

"Disguise is not a difficult matter when one has made a study of it for years," he said. "And now, sir, I must get busy. Can you give me a description of this touring-car which has been stolen?"

"Yes. Lord Eastwood has left a full description with me."

And the Head read out the particulars, which had been jotted down on his writing-pad.

"Very good, sir!" said Pat Donovan, who had felt a bit shaky at first, but who was quite at his ease now. "You also mentioned in your letter that a number of War Bonds had been abstracted from your safe."

The Head nodded.

"Last night my safe was broken into and the Bonds stolen," he said. "Their aggregate value amounted to eight hundred pounds. And the tragedy of it is that the Bonds are not my own property. I was holding them in trust for one of my pupils—an Indian boy."

Pat Donovan made several entries in his notebook. He looked for all the world like an eager sleuth-hound as he stood there, darting questions at the Head from time to time.

"And you are of opinion, sir, that those thefts were committed by Dawlish?" he said at length.

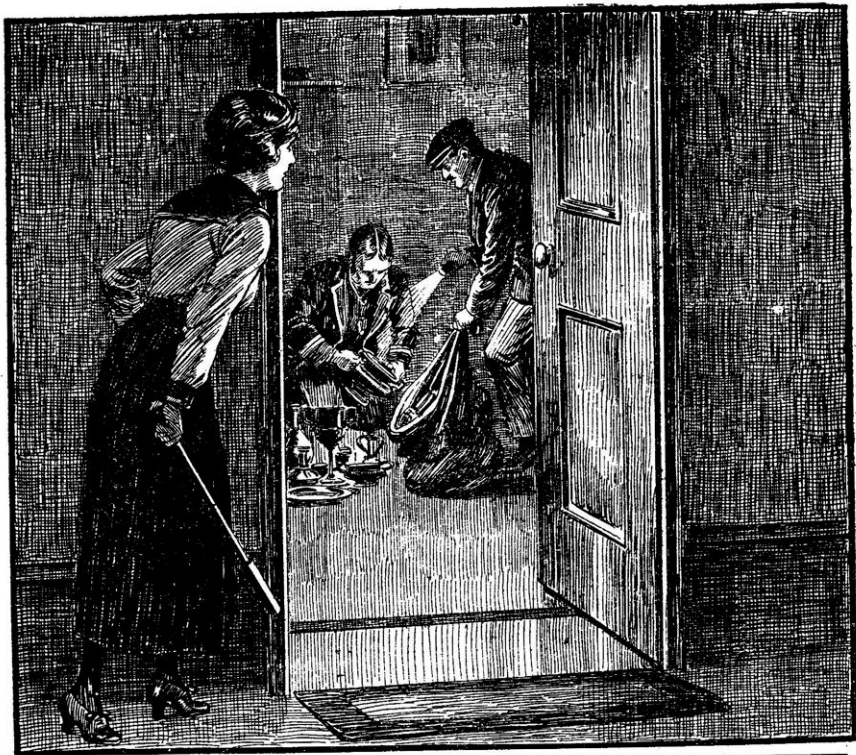
"Yes."

"I am sorry I cannot concur in that opinion."

The Head stared.

"You—you think that Dawlish took no part in this business, Mr. Rivers?"

"It is probable that he had a hand in the capture of the motor-car; but it is



The door of the next room was open, and a couple of men were busily engaged in loading their sacks with plunder. One of them Marie recognised on the instant as Dawlish. The other was the new gate-porter—the man she knew to be her father! (See chapter 9.)

inconceivable that he also appropriated the War Bonds. Having stolen the car, he would naturally make off with all speed. It would not be to his advantage to dally in the neighbourhood.

"Dawlish is a cunning scoundrel—"

"Quite so. But he would scarcely be foolhardy enough to linger in the district and expose himself to unnecessary risks. We may safely assume that, having annexed Lord Eastwood's car, he evacuated this locality as quickly as possible."

"That is a line of reasoning which had not occurred to me," confessed Dr. Holmes. "Your theory seems sound enough. And yet I cannot bring myself to believe that Dawlish was not concerned in the theft of the War Bonds from my safe."

"In my opinion, sir, the War Bonds were stolen by some person inside the school—somebody who knew that they had been entrusted to your care. Dawlish would not know of the existence of the Bonds. Again, it would be much simpler for your safe to be raided by someone on the premises than by an outside agent. Taking one consideration with another, I have come to the conclusion that the theft of the car and the theft of the Bonds were entirely separate outrages, performed by separate persons. That Dawlish stole the car there seems

to be little doubt; but the marauder who broke open your safe is undoubtedly an individual under this roof."

The Head looked very grave. Hitherto it had not occurred to him that the thief was a resident of the school. And the possibility that the Bonds had been stolen by one of the boys was very distressing to the kind-hearted old gentleman.

"You may rely upon me, sir, to use my utmost endeavours to bring the guilty party to book," said Donovan.

"But the greatest secrecy must be observed with regard to my presence here. I anticipate that a further theft will be attempted, and I shall thus have an opportunity of apprehending the thief. But if it becomes known that a detective is here my chance of success will be seriously jeopardised. I intend to take every precaution to keep my identity a secret."

"But your daughter, Mr. Rivers—and Talbot! They will know who you are."

"I wish you to send for them, sir, and instruct them that they are on no account to come near me or speak to me. If the thief were to see them in conversation with me his suspicions would be aroused."

"Naturally," said the Head. "I will see that your wishes are carried out, Mr. Rivers."

"Thank you, sir. And now, if you will kindly put me wise as to the duties of a gate-porter, I will go about my business."

A few moments later Patrick Donovan, cracksman, was engaged in sweeping up the leaves outside the porter's lodge.

He chuckled intermittently in the course of his exertions.

"Dawlish was quite right when he said it wouldn't be a very difficult part to play," he muttered. "Everything worked like a charm!"

Taggles had gone. He had taken Mrs. Taggles with him, and the school tuck-shop was presided over by a member of the kitchen staff.

Tom Merry & Co. had a big surprise when they came out of the quadrangle after lessons.

"Hallo!" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

"A new porter, by Jove!"

"What's become of Taggles?" said Tom Merry blankly.

"If you ask me," said George Alfred Grundy, "Taggs' been given the order of the boot!"

"My hat!"

"Why?"

"He made too free with the gin-bottle last night. He was late in locking-up."

and Railton spotted him. I dare say he was reported to the Head, and sacked. "Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "I can't imagine St. Jim's without old Taggy!"

And neither could the others. Taggles had come to be regarded as a landmark—an institution. His services at the school had extended over many years, and he was as much a part of the old place as the tower or the cloisters.

"Let's come and interview this new merchant," said Talbot.

And a large party of juniors swarmed across the quad in the direction of the lodge.

The new porter eyed them surlily.

"Who are you?" demanded Tom Merry.

"The Dook of Wayland!" was the reply. "An' you?"

There was a chuckle from the juniors, a chuckle in which Tom Merry did not join.

"Don't be funny!" he said sharply. "Where's Taggles?"

"Gone!"

"But why, and wherefore?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Which he ain't been well, an' the 'ead's ordered 'im a rest an' change."

"Oh!"

"Then you are meahly a temporary portah—what?" said Arthur Augustus.

"That's so, Lord Vere de Vere."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus clenched his hands.

"Are you twyin' to be wude to me, my man?" he demanded.

The new porter made a gesture of impatience.

"Clear hoff!" he growled.

"I wufuse to clear off! I also wufuse to be addressed in this insolent man- nah!"

"Oh, cheese it! You make me tired! Run away an' pick flowers!"

The words goaded Arthur Augustus to fierce indignation. He pushed back his cuffs, and advanced towards the new porter.

"Put up your hands, you wottah!" he exclaimed. "An' keep that beastly broom away from my twousans!"

"If you don't clear off," said the porter, "I'll sweep you up with the rest of the rubbish!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. were enjoying the situation. But Arthur Augustus wasn't. His dignity had been outraged. He had been insulted, and he meant to avenge the insult.

Taggles' deputy seemed a much younger man than Taggles himself, and the swell of St. Jim's had no scruples in attacking him with his fists.

"Put up your hands, I wapest!" he said wrathfully. "I am about to administer a fearful thwashin'!"

But Gussy's warlike intention sadly missed fire.

To the amazement of the spectators, and to the utter chagrin and consternation of Arthur Augustus, that elegant youth found himself seized in a grip of iron and swung across the porter's bended knee.

Whack, whack, whack!

The open palm of Pat Donovan descended upon Gussy's tight-fitting trousers, and the swell of St. Jim's struggled and roared. Seldom in his school career had he been subjected to such an indignity.

"Yawoooooh! Chuck it, you wottah!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Cnhand me, you wuffian! Weleese me at once! Wescue, you fellahs!"

Tom Merry & Co. were too paralysed to intervene.

The only fellow who retained his

presence of mind was Manners, who swiftly produced his vest-pocket camera, and took a snapshot of the extraordinary spectacle of Arthur Augustus being chastised like a small child.

Click!

"That's the best one I've had this term!" said Manners, in tones of satisfaction.

And then a warning voice exclaimed: "Cave! Here comes the Head!"

Pat Donovan desisted at last from his exertions, and he set Arthur Augustus on his feet.

The swell of St. Jim's was purple with rage and humiliation.

"You—you howwid brute!" he panted.

And, regardless of the possible consequences to himself, he rushed at the new porter.

Talbot grasped Arthur Augustus by the shoulder and swung him back.

"Steady on, Gussy!" he muttered.

"You can't commit assault and battery with the Head looking on, you know!"

"Pway weleese me, Talbot! I am determined to get to grips with that wuffian!"

D'Arcy!"

The Head had arrived on the scene. His voice was thunderous.

"Bai Jove! I—"

"How dare you behave in such a disgraceful manner, D'Arcy?"

"I have been insulted, sir—grossly insulted—by this scoundrel!"

"Silence, boy! You have no right to speak of the new porter in such objectionable terms."

"But he—he threatened to sweep me up with the wubbish, sir!"

"Doubtless you have been pestering him and annoying him," said the Head.

"Is that so?" he added, turning to Donovan.

Yes.

"Yesir."

"Ah! I thought so! You boys are clear to understand that the gate-porter is not to be interfered with in the discharge of his duties. You will disperse at once, all of you! Talbot, I wish you to accompany me to my study."

Tom Merry & Co. promptly transferred themselves to another quarter. And Talbot, greatly wondering, set off in the wake of the Head.

CHAPTER 8.

Astounding News!

MARIE RIVERS was waiting in the Head's study when Dr. Holmes entered with Talbot.

The school nurse was looking very apprehensive. A few moments before, Toby, the page, had brought her a message that the Head wished to see her.

Marie suspected that something was seriously amiss; and the Head, noting her troubled gaze, speedily reassured her.

"There is no cause for alarm. Miss Rivers," he said.

An expression of relief came over Marie's face.

"You are possibly aware," continued the Head, "that your father is here?"

Marie gave a start.

"My father?"

"Yes."

"But—but I have not seen him!"

The Head smiled.

"You probably have, without being aware of his identity," he said.

Marie looked frankly puzzled, and so did Talbot.

"I sent for your father, as a representative of Scotland Yard, in order that he might endeavour to clear up certain matters which are unfathomable to the local police. The theft of Lord Eastwood's car, and a subsequent burglary

at this school—

"A burglary, sir?" echoed Talbot, in astonishment.

"Yes, my boy. My study was broken into last night, and some valuable documents stolen. After a consultation with Mr. Railton, I decided to invoke the aid of Mr. Rivers. He has accordingly arrived at the school in disguise."

Both Talbot and Marie uttered exclamations of amazement.

"Mr. Rivers is taking Taggles' place as gate-porter until such time as he has elucidated the matters I mentioned just now."

"You mean to say, sir," said Talbot incredulously, "that the new gate-porter is Marie's father?"

The Head nodded.

"Then all I can say, sir, is that he's an even better actor than I imagined."

"He is certainly playing his part well."

"But on no account must his identity become known to the school at large. That is why I have sent for you both. I want you to promise me that you will not converse with Mr. Rivers, or be seen in his company, until he has succeeded in solving the problems that confront him."

Marie Rivers looked thunderstruck.

"Not speak to my own father, Dr. Holmes?" she exclaimed.

"No. I have to impose such a restriction upon you. It is only natural that you should wish to communicate with your father. At the same time, it is highly inadvisable. If the thief happens to be within the school—and I sincerely hope it is otherwise—and he finds that you are on terms of familiarity with the gate-porter, he will at once surmise your father's identity. Surely that is quite clear to you?"

Marie nodded thoughtfully.

The prospect of being within a stone's throw of her father, and yet being unable to speak to him, was decidedly tantalising, but the Head was quite right.

It would not do for her or Talbot to be seen in the gate-porter's company.

"I promise you I shall not speak to my father until he has brought the thief to book," said Marie.

"Thank you," said the Head. "And you, Talbot?"

"I promise, sir," said Talbot, though his brain was in a whirl.

Try as he would, he could see no connection between the new gate-porter and John Rivers.

Talbot's keen eyes could penetrate the majority of disguises, but John Rivers' latest disguise was, he reflected, absolutely impenetrable.

Having given the Head the required assurance, Marie and Talbot withdrew.

Out in the passage they exchanged astonished glances.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Talbot. "This is a surprise-packet, Marie, and no mistake! Fancy the Professor being here!"

"And we can't even say 'How'd you do?'" said Marie, with a rueful smile.

"It's amazing to think that the Professor's at St. Jim's in the role of a 'tec,'" said Talbot.

Marie nodded.

"All I hope is that he succeeds in laying Dawlish by the heels," she said. "It was Dawlish who stole Lord Eastwood's car—there's no question of that."

"And it was Dawlish who was responsible for last night's affair," said Talbot.

"The Head seems to think it may have been one of the St. Jim's fellows; but that's all bunkum. Still, it's best to be on the safe side; and if we were seen in the Professor's company the thief might smell a rat."

"It's possible that Dawlish is out of the district by now," said Marie thoughtfully.

Talbot shook his head.

"Not he! He's made a couple of big hauls, but he's not satisfied. That's one of Dawlish's weaknesses; he sticks to the same pitch too long. And it'll prove his undoing. If he attempts any light-fingered stunts to-night the Professor will collar him."

Marie's eyes sparkled. "It would be a big triumph for father," she said.

"And it would be a relief to everybody, too, to know that Dawlish was safe behind prison bars. I loathe the scoundrel! I can't forget how he kidnapped you that time, Marie. And it's my belief that he'll have another shot at it."

Marie looked startled. "You really think he will, Toff?"

"I do."

"But there is no motive—"

"There is every motive. Dawlish won't be happy until he succeeds in persuading you to join his gang. You'll never do that, of course; but the rascal will do his level best to make you, if he gets half a chance. Be on your guard, Marie."

The girl smiled rather grimly. "Dawlish will not find it easy to repeat his previous performance, Toff," she said. "I shall be quite ready for him, if he makes the attempt."

"You'll promise me not to go out of gates alone?"

"I promise."

"Good! And let's hope that before many hours have passed Dawlish will be under lock and key."

That hope was fervently shared by Marie Rivers. She nodded to her chum, and went back to the sanatorium.

As Talbot stepped out into the sunny quadrangle the Terrible Three approached him.

"Licked?" inquired Tom Merry.

"No."

"What did the Head want you for, then?"

"Oh—er—nothing much," said Talbot awkwardly.

"Did he invite you to tea?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Hardly."

"Well, what the thump did he jaw you about?" demanded Manners.

"It was a private conversation," said Talbot, "and I can't repeat it."

"Oh!"

The Terrible Three were taken aback.

"Well, if you won't confide in your uncles," said Monty Lowther, after a pause, "there's nothing more to be said."

"Coming along, Talbot?" asked Tom Merry.

"Where to?"

"Porter's lodge. We're going to jape the new merchant."

Talbot shook his head. "I should advise you to go easy," he said. "Taggy's deputy knows how to look after himself. The way he handled Taggy this afternoon shows that he can give as good as he gets."

When he uttered that warning, Talbot was under the impression of course, that the new gate-porter was John Rivers.

What would he have thought had he known that the latest arrival at St. Jim's was Pat Donovan—Jim Dawlish's right-hand man?

CHAPTER 9.

A Drama of the Night!

DARKNESS hung like a pall over the silent quadrangle of St. Jim's.

The great building was hushed and still. Not a light was to be seen at any of the windows. Even the most studiously inclined masters and fellows had retired for the night.

The porter's lodge, like the other buildings, was in darkness.

Boom!

It was the first stroke of midnight sounding from the old clock-tower.

An interval of silence followed. And then, from the dusky roadway, sounded the purr of an automobile.

It was Lord Eastwood's car which halted in the shadow of the school wall, though it was not recognisable as such.

The members of Jim Dawlish's gang had completely transformed the car. It had been altered and repainted, and it bore a fresh number.

The headlights of the vehicle were subdued. And presently they were completely extinguished.

Jim Dawlish had stepped down from the driver's seat, and he crept cautiously along until he reached the school gateway.

Arrived here, Dawlish gave a low whistle.

There was no response. Dawlish clicked his teeth impatiently, and whistled again—louder this time.

After a brief interval there was a jingle of keys, and Pat Donovan emerged from the porter's lodge.

"That you, Pat?"

Jim Dawlish's voice was low and tense. "Yes!"

"Buck up and open the gates!"

A moment later the big gates swung apart. They were left open, and Jim Dawlish accompanied his companion across the dusky quadrangle.

The two men walked on tiptoe, and they conversed as they went, being careful not to raise their voices.

"You've brought the car, Jim?" muttered Donovan.

"Of course! Didn't you hear it arrive?"

"Afraid I was in the act of nodding off to sleep."

"Then the sooner you pull yourself together the better!" said Dawlish curtly.

"We can't afford to be dozy or slow-witted on this job. How have you got on? Did you spoof the headmaster all right?"

"I shouldn't be here now if I hadn't worked the oracle. I should have been arrested as an impostor. I pulled the wool over Mr. Schoolmaster's eyes beautifully; and I arranged with him to enter into conversation with me."

"A very neat way of shakin' off their unwelcome attentions, Pat. You've got more savvy than I gave you credit for."

"Thanks!" said Pat drily.

"Have you been able to get a glimpse of the room where the trophies ain't things are kept?"

"Yes, rather! I shinned up a ladder under pretence of cleanin' the window."

"An' you saw the silver cups ain't so forth?"

"Yes. They'll make a stunnin' haul. As soon as we've seen this little job through, Jim, we shall be able to retire."

"Don't count your spoils before they're bagged!" was Dawlish's terse comment.

"By the way, have you got a clear field?"

"Absolutely! There's nobody in that part of the buildin', barrin' Marie Rivers. The matron's gone on her holidays."

"An' you're certain that no traps have been laid for us?"

"Certain! The headmaster, thinkin' I'm John Rivers, is leavin' the catchin' of the crooks to me!"

"Door's best," replied Donovan. "It's locked, but we can force it open in a jiffy. Have you got the sacks?"

"What if you think I've been carryin' under my arm all this time—my bed-clothes?" asked Dawlish sarcastically.

By this time the two men had reached the school sanatorium. They forced an entry through a window on the ground floor—the window of an empty ward.

In this deserted apartment they paused for a moment before carrying out their nefarious deed.

"Now, look here," said Dawlish, in a low tone, "it's just possible that that girl may be spinn' on us, an' will attempt to interfere."

"An' if that's the case—"

"We must collar her, an' take her away with us in the car. It would never do to let her stay here an' raise the alarm. We should have the 'tees on our track before the night was out."

Donovan nodded.

"Ready?" asked Dawlish.

"Yes!"

"Lead the way, then!"

And the midnight marauders proceeded to the room in which the silver trophies had been stored at the Head's direction.

They congratulated themselves that their movements had not been heard. But they were too premature.

In the adjoining room sat Marie Rivers.

The girl had not retired for the night, deeming sleep out of the question. She was perusing a novel by the light of the reading-lamp.

The novel was a good one, as novels went, but it failed to absorb Marie's attention. Her mind was filled with apprehensions and forebodings. It seemed to her that some untoward calamity was impending.

Marie was no coward. But, try as she would, she could not dismiss the vague and shadowy fears which menaced her peace of mind.

Her thoughts turned to her father, whom she supposed was now in the porter's lodge by the school gates. She was strongly tempted to go and see him, now that no prying eyes would witness the interview. But she remembered her promise to the Head, and remained where she was.

And presently a faint tapping sound reached Marie's ears. She leaned forward in her chair, and listened intently.

Tap, tap, tap!

Marie closed her novel, and rose to her feet. She knew at once that there was something wrong—that she was not alone in the sanatorium.

And with each successive tap she heard one word seemed to be dinned into her brain—burglars!

Having ascertained the direction from whence the tapping came, Marie extinguished the reading-lamp, and armed herself with the poker from the fireplace. She felt instinctively that one of the marauders was Jim Dawlish; and if her suspicion proved correct, she would not scruple to bring the poker into action.

Deeds, not words, were necessary in order to deal effectively with a scoundrel like Dawlish.

The tapping noise had ceased now. It was followed by the sound of a door being stealthily pushed open.

Marie knew, of course, that much valuable property was stored in the adjoining room; and it was this property that the burglars were undoubtedly after.

"Afraid they'll be unlucky," reflected Marie.

And she groped her way to the door.

The next moment Marie saw everything there to be seen.

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The door of the next room was open wide; and a couple of men, by the light of an electric torch, were busily engaged in loading their sacks with plunder. One of the two Marie recognised on the instant as Dawlish.

And the other?

Marie's heart almost ceased to beat as she identified the new gate-porter.

Her father!

But it could not be—it was impossible! John Rivers was no longer a cracksmann. And, even if he were, he would never throw in his lot with Jim Dawlish.

This man, who had successfully masqueraded as a gate-porter, was not a Scotland Yard detective. He was not John Rivers. He was an accomplice of Dawlish; and he had sailed under false colours!

These thoughts passed through Marie's brain in a flash. Her quick intuition told her all that had happened.

Marie's grasp tightened on the poker. She alone stood between burglars and the success of their enterprise. She alone could prevent them from getting clear with the spoils.

There was no time to raise an alarm.

Every silver cup, every medal, every trinket which of recent years had been fought for and won on the playing-fields of St. Jim's had been placed in the sacks. "Guess we'll beat it now, Pat," muttered Dawlish.

He turned, and was about to shoulder one of the sacks, when he caught sight of Marie Rivers standing in the doorway.

Dawlish uttered a savage imprecation, and lowered the sack. And as he did so Marie was upon him with the spring of a tigris.

Crash! The poker descended upon the scoundrel's shoulder, and he recoiled with a snarl of rage and pain.

But Pat Donovan was not idle. He switched off his electric-torch, and grappled with Marie in the darkness.

There was a short, swift struggle, and the poker was wrenched from the girl's grasp.

She hit out with her clenched fist; and the blow, catching Donovan on the point of the jaw, caused him to reel.

Marie followed up promptly. But before she could repeat her achievement, Dawlish sprang upon her from the rear. Something—it felt like a damp cloth—was clapped over the girl's nose and mouth, and pressed there tightly.

Marie struggled against it—she fought with the fierceness of desperation—and her efforts were futile. Gradually her struggles grew feebler; her senses seemed to swim; and she remembered no more.

The powerfully-built Dawlish swung Marie's inanimate form across his shoulder as if she had been a small child. Then, leaving his confederate to guard the loot, he hurried away, not pausing until he reached the car which stood in the shadow of the school wall.

Marie Rivers was laid on the seat at the back, and a rug was thrown over her. The girl showed no sign of life. Not for some time was she likely to recover from the effects of the chloroform.

Having deposited Marie in the car, Dawlish hurried back to the sanatorium.

Pat Donovan was waiting for him. He was cursing his jaw.

"That minx was a hot handful, Jim!" he growled.

Dawlish nodded.

"She won't worry us again," he said.

Donovan looked scared.

"Jim! Do you mean to say that you—"

"—you've—"

"Put her to sleep for good?" said Dawlish. "Great Scott, no! She'll be"

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as right as ninepence in a couple of hours. And we shall be miles an' miles away by then! Come on! It isn't safe to stop here gassin'."

Shouldering a sack apiece, the two precious rascals quitted the room and the building, and crossed the silent quadrangle with their spoils.

And a few minutes later the car, which showed neither head nor rear lights, went speeding away into the night.

And in that car, white-faced and unconscious—at the complete mercy of her kidnappers—lay Talbot's girl chum!

CHAPTER TEN, III

In Defence of Marie!

"THIS is topping!"

"Simply stunning!"

"With a bit of luck, we shall be here all day!"

The occupants of the Shell dormitory at St. Jim's were enjoying themselves immensely.

It was past the time for the rising-bell to ring; yet no summons had clanged out for the morning air.

The juniors were by no means averse to an extra spell in bed. And nobody attempted to rise.

"The new porter doesn't know his job," said Manners.

"He's either forgotten, or he doesn't know, the first duty of the day," said Tom Merry.

It was certainly a unique experience for the fellows to be able to have a protracted stay in bed.

Taggles would never have overlooked such an important duty as the ringing of the rising-bell. Whatever the climatic conditions—wet or fine, snowy or showery—Taggles could always be relied upon to ring the bell punctually in the morning.

"This new merchant's going the right way to get the order of the boot!" remarked Grundy.

"He'll be going in a few days, in any case," said Wilkins. "He's only taking Taggy's place for the time being."

The only fellow who did not revel in the situation was Talbot.

What was wrong with John Rivers?

That was the question which hammered at Talbot's brain.

Perhaps something had happened during the night, and the Professor was in danger.

Talbot conjured up visions of an encounter between John Rivers and Dawlish—an encounter in which the Professor might have come off second best.

This thought tormented Talbot to such an extent that, unable to endure the suspense any longer, he got out of bed and started to dress. And at that moment Kildare of the Sixth stepped into the dormitory.

The captain of St. Jim's was looking very grave.

"Why aren't you kids getting up?" he demanded.

"We're waiting for the rising-bell, Kildare," said Bernard Glyn.

"Then you'll have to wait a thundering long time!"

"Why? Isn't the new porter up yet?"

"He got up jolly early," said Kildare grimly. "In the middle of the night, in fact. And he's cleared off."

"Mr. M?"

"He paid a visit to the sunny before he went, and lifted all the silver cups and things."

Talbot looked utterly taken aback.

"I don't believe it," he said.

Kildare frowned.

"You think I'm indulging in leg-pulling—what?" he said. "Well, I'm not. I'm stating the facts. All the"

school trophies, which had been stored

in one of the wards of the sunny, have been stolen. And the sudden disappearance of the new porter indicates clearly enough that he's the thief. Miss Rivers has disappeared, too—"

"What!"

"From which circumstances we may safely assume that she was in co. with the scoundrel."

"That's not true!"

Talbot's voice, angry and indignant, rang through the dormitory.

"It's certainly a bit thick to accuse Miss Marie of being in partnership with a—"

"Tumble out, you kids," said Kildare sharply.

"One moment!" said Talbot. "It's up to you, Kildare, to withdraw that unfair accusation against Miss Marie!"

"Don't be absurd!" was Kildare's retort. "I wish I could think Miss Rivers innocent, but I can't in the circumstances. It's only too evident that she was mixed up in the business. She must have shown the porter where the trophies were stored—"

"Rats!" Talbot quite forgot the respect due to the captain of the school.

"If, as you say, the things have been looted, they were looted by somebody outside the school—by that scoundrel Dawlish, to be precise. The new porter couldn't possibly have had a hand in it—"

"Why?" inquired several voices.

"Because," said Talbot impressively, "he was here with an exactly opposite motive. He was a detective!"

"My hat!"

Talbot's words caused quite a sensation.

"Now that there's no longer seems to be any need for secrecy, I may as well tell you that the detective was John Rivers—Marie's father!"

By revealing the porter's identity, Talbot hoped to disarm suspicion, so far as Marie Rivers was concerned.

But his information only served to strengthen the evidence against Marie.

"It's only too obvious what has happened," said Kildare. "John Rivers is following his former profession—that of a cracksmann. He came here in the role of a detective; and he spooed the Head and he and his daughter conspired together, and got away with the rich haul."

"Hear, hear!"

Kildare's opinion was echoed by everybody in the dormitory with the exception of Talbot and the Terrible Three.

And even Tom Merry, Manners and Lowther were beginning to entertain doubts as to Marie's innocence.

And Talbot?

White-faced and passionate—with tightly-clenched hands and blazing eyes—he advanced towards Kildare.

"You are wrong!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "You don't know Marie as I do. She is the son of honour. And her father—she is as straight as a die. His past is against him—but you've no right to brand him as a thief! He is innocent—they are both innocent!"

Kildare waved the excited junior back.

"Time will show," he said quietly.

"Yes, time would show. Time would show that Kildare—well-meaning though he was—was wrong, and that Talbot was right. The time would come when Marie and her father would stand completely vindicated of the charge which had been levelled against their honour. But that time was not yet!"

THE END.

(Another magnificent, long, complete story of breathless adventure, featuring Marie Rivers and her father will appear next week. Order your copy of the GEM Library to-day!)

OUR SECOND COMPLETE SCHOOL STORY.



THE FINGER OF FATE

A Splendid Tale of Dickie Dexter & Co., of St. Katie's

By **MICHAEL POOLE.**

CHAPTER I.

The Trials of Bill Strong.

THERE were, of course, other Forms at Katie's besides the Transitus; but, so far as the Trans were concerned, there was only one Form that really mattered, outside themselves.

That was the Fifth Form. Or, to be perfectly exact, THE Fifth Form.

There were really three Fifth Forms. One was the Fifth (C.S.), which stands for Civil Service. The "Civvies" was the Form where the high-browed, earnest-looking swots, who were going in for the higher branches of the Civil Service, began their training.

There was also the Science Fifth, commonly known as the Mugs, because, well, because they were. What's the good of arguing about it?

But these had nothing to do with the real, genuine Fifth. Strictly speaking, the Fifth was the Form just above the Transitus, but for quite a number of reasons the Transitus absolutely refused to recognise that the Fifth were above them in any way whatever.

In work the syllabus of the Fifth was similar to that of the Transitus, but the Transitus frankly admitted that the Fifth could usually give them points in this department.

But on the playing-fields the rivalry between the two Forms reached an agonising point. In football, cricket, and rowing they were, and always had been, pretty evenly balanced.

Fifth versus Transitus aroused as much excitement as St. Katherine's versus Dulchester College. In the past football season the Fifth and the Trans had

fought three times officially, and on each occasion Bill Strong had led his men to victory.

Bill Strong was very keen to do the same in cricket. The first match early in the season ended in a draw. When stumps were drawn the Trans had two wickets to fall and 20 runs to get.

Of course, they might have done it. But even Bill Strong was doubtful, and the Fifth asserted very definitely that they had been robbed of victory by a mere matter of ten minutes or so.

Then came the second match. For two or three weeks Bill Strong watched his men anxiously, and a few days before the great game he had a calm, glad feeling in his heart that, bar accidents, they would wipe the earth with the Fifth.

Unfortunately, the accidents happened. At the very last minute almost, Bill had to scramble round and put in three reserve men.

The last of the three reserves was Dickie Dexter. The Kid was amongst the also rans in the cricketing world, and there were probably three or four others who were just about as good as he was. But Bill chose the Kid because he knew he wouldn't be so nervous as others.

The story of the match is an exciting one up to a certain point.

Smithy, who captained the Fifth, won the toss, and decided to bat first. It was a strenuous and exciting innings, and when the tenth wicket fell 109 runs had been recorded to the credit of Smithy's eleven.

Bill Strong opened for the Transitus in company with Curtis. This was the first time the Kangaroo had headed the list, but his recent performances justified the position.

The game started fairly well. Of the two, the Kangaroo was the more polished and easy batsman, but Bill was as safe as houses. When 10 runs had been scored the crowd settled down to a long partnership.

Then the Kangaroo opened his shoulders to what looked like a really soft and gentle little ball. He meant to lift it right out of the field and give the kids a job in finding it.

But something went wrong. The ball twisted, and shot up into the air, until the fielders had a chance to discuss quite carefully who was going to take the catch. Smithy himself took on the job, and when the ball decided to come back to earth again Smithy made no mistake. The Kangaroo was out for 6!

It was a hard fight after that. Bill Strong indulged in no fancy hitting, but played a sound, careful game, and he saw seven more wickets fall after the Kangaroo had left him.

Eight wickets were down for 99. In a way, it was a repetition of the last match, but this would be fought to a finish. If the Transitus won, the Fifth would have to dry up about the result of the last match. If the Fifth won, they would be able to talk as though they'd won both matches.

Grubb joined Bill Strong for the ninth wicket. As a batsman, the Worm's chief qualification was that he could do the stone-walling act quite well. He remained ten minutes, during which time Bill added a useful 6 runs.

Then Smithy took the ball, and sent down a streak of lightning for the Worm to handle. It took the off-wicket, and Grubb retired, having compiled, as Big

Hallam wisely remarked, a very useful book.

"You do the same, Kid!" Curtis urged as Dexter came out, and others begged him to emulate the Worm.

"Leave the runs to Bill!" they begged. "You keep your wicket, and Bill will do the rest."

The Kid almost ran to the crease. From the other end he heard Bill's voice, as calm as ever: "Cherrio, Kid! Steady!"

Transitus: 105 runs! One wicket to fall, and 5 runs wanted to win! And Bill Strong was still at the wicket. It was quite certain that Bill would carry his bat. He'd get the 5 runs all right in the next over—if the Kid kept his wicket to the next over!

The Kid knew all about that. He knew, too, that if he could get 1 run and get to the other end, Bill would manage the rest.

Smithy sent down another streak of lightning; but, as was the way with Smithy's bowling, it was just off the wicket, and the Kid never touched it.

The excitement at this stage was intense. It was too fierce to utter a sound, and there was a sort of strained silence as Smithy took the ball for the third effort of this over.

Another lightning-streak—and a better ball this time! The Kid moved his bat very slightly. There was just a faint flick, and the ball was flashing about three inches below the wicket-keeper's fingers. The slip men jerked into life just too late to take the proper action.

The Kid turned and saw it pouncing over the turf. Safe—and good for a run! He didn't stop to argue whether it was a fluke or not, but acted on the instant.

"Come on, Bill!" he yelled, and started off.

Bill Strong raised his hand, for he had seen Vickers at long-stop going to meet that ball. But the Kid was already on his way, and Bill knew that to hesitate would mean losing the wicket for a certainty.

He dashed forward, and even as he ran saw Vickers gather up the ball and aim stiffly for the wicket.

Vicker's aim had been dead true. The ball flew off without the wicket-keeper touching the ball. And Bill was a yard out of the crease when it happened!

"That!" half a dozen voices yelled, and the umpire bowed his head.

"Out!" he said sorrowfully, and Bill turned sadly towards the pavilion.

The crowd saw him, and knew that the match was over. The Fifth had won! The Dickie Dexter at the other wicket the news came slowly. They were cheering before he really grasped that Bill had been run out! Bill run out! And the match lost!

And it was the Kid's fault that Bill had been run out. The Kid had lost the match and spoiled Bill's record!

Strong, W., run out 49
Dexter, R., not out 0

There aren't any words in the English language to express just how the Kid felt at the real full truth got hold of him. The remarks of the Transitus fellows when he got back to the pavilion were like acid rubbed into an open wound.

"You oughtn't to have tried that run, Kid!" they said sorrowfully. "The match was as good as ours! Another three balls and Bill would have had the bowling!"

"Hard luck, Strong!" Jolly Roger called to Bill. "Very hard luck indeed!"

Of course, the Fifth were hopeless after THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 643.

that match. They excelled themselves in bitter jests, and the Kid got more than his share. If he had ever had any doubt about the fact that he was responsible for the downfall of the Transitus, Smithy and a few others made the truth quite clear to him.

"That was a good hit of yours the other day, Kid!" Smithy said gently. "You ought to practise it. How did you do it? Let's see. How many runs did you make? Oh, I'm sorry, dear boy! You ought to get Strong to run faster!"

The Kid tried to explain to Bill Strong how sorry he was about it all, and how he never really meant to call for a run, and, anyhow, he never knew that Vickers had been playing as a sort of third man and longstop all the afternoon.

"That's all right, Kid," Bill said. "It was just a bit of bad luck for both of us. The Fifth think no end of themselves just now, but wait till we meet 'em in the Senior Fours!"

Cricket for a time had lost its interest for the Transitus. Rowing was the sport that counted. If anything, the Trans Four were better than ever this year.

Jimmy Curtis had turned out to be a sort of second Bill Strong in the athletic line. As an oarsman he was a distinct addition to the resources at Bill's command, and was easily the second-best man in the boat. Bunting and Tommy Roper were pretty good, but, until he discovered the capacity of Curtis, Bill had been seriously disturbed about a fourth man to make up the crew.

The Fifth were putting out a pretty good four this year. They had knocked out the Sixth and the Matric. It is only fair to point out that no four was allowed to have more than two members of the School eight in the boat, and that was a handicap to the Sixth, of course.

The Transitus had easily beaten the Civvies and the Remove. As in cricket, the final struggle lay between the Fifth and the Trans.

The race was to be rowed at 3.30 on the third Wednesday in July. On the Monday evening before the great day Jolly Roger told Bill Strong that in his opinion the Transitus would win.

There weren't any giddy larks going on in the Trans round about that time. The Kid was probably keener than anybody else. For Bill's sake, for his own sake, and for the sake of the Form, he hoped that the Fifth would get a first-rate landing.

As anybody knows, the last day or two before a race is the most trying time of all. Even Bill Strong began to look a bit worried about this time, and watched the other three anxiously, or spoke kindly to little Bunting on of the few who was coxing for the Trans. There was another rule of the races—the cox could be chosen from any Form, and it was quite a fair arrangement.

On the Tuesday, just after morning school, Jimmy Curtis looked a little troubled. Bill Strong asked him about it at once.

"It's nothing," Curtis assured him. "I've had a letter from one of my relatives in England—wants me to meet one or two relatives—in Dulchester tomorrow afternoon. They'll be at the Belvoir Hotel at 3.30, and hope that I will be there."

Bill Strong laughed. "I should think so," he said cheerfully. "Three-thirty tomorrow! My giddy aunt! I guess you'll be quite a long way from the Belvoir at that time. You'll be waiting for the crack of Big Hallam's popgun, my lad!"

"Of course!" Curtis agreed; but he still looked troubled.

Presently Blott came to the study, and

desired the presence of Curtis at the headmaster's room immediately.

In about fifteen minutes Curtis was back again. Somehow, he looked older, and he seemed sorry for himself.

"Come on, Kangy!" Bill said to him. "We're having just a gentle paddle this afternoon. Are you fit?"

"I'm sorry, Bill," he said slowly. "I'm—You'd better take Heath out with you. I—I'm a wash-out for to-morrow. Got to meet this bally—er—uncle of mine! The Head says so."

"But—great Scott! I mean—" Bill waved his hands helplessly. "Didn't you tell the Beak? You can't go to-morrow! Why—but why talk about it? Just you tell the Beak that you're rowing in the final of the Senior Fours to-morrow. He'll understand!"

"I told him," Curtis said helplessly. "He quite understands. But he says that this is more important, and that you will easily get a substitute."

They talked of the matter for some time. Bill went and saw Roger, and Mr. Blunt himself went to the Head. Bunting and Roper came in, followed by Heath and one or two members of the Trans. They all agreed with Bill Strong that it was simply impossible.

Then Jolly Roger came back, and they looked at him hopefully. Roger wouldn't let Curtis out the race for the sake of some idiotic relatives who didn't know anything about the Senior Fours.

"Ah, I've seen the Head, Strong, and discussed the matter with him!" Jolly Roger said, in his best official way. "I is very unfortunate, but I am afraid that I am bound to agree with the headmaster's decision. Curtis will have to drop out of the crew for to-morrow. He is bound to meet these relatives of his at the time named."

"But—" Bill Strong struggled helplessly to point out quite a lot of things.

"I am afraid that is final, Strong," Roger said firmly. "I am very sorry—very sorry indeed! But we must do our best. Ah, Heath! You will row Heath at number three, and let Roper take bow, Strong. Better have a trial spin again this afternoon. I'll join you at the boathouse almost immediately."

He went out of the room. Nobody spoke for quite a long time after he had gone. Bill Strong sat on a chair and stared dully and helplessly at the opposite wall. Curtis had shrunk into a corner, and nobody would have known he was the big and noble Kangaroo. He was crushed and helpless.

Even the Kid was silent. What could he say? Was this a time for feeble words?

You might have thought that the race could be postponed. But they never dragged things in that way at Katie's, and nobody even suggested it.

Bill rose at last, slowly and weakly.

"Come on, Heath," he said. "It's hard luck on you being dragged in at the last gasp, but you'll do your best. If we get licked—well—"

He couldn't say any more. Sorrowfully the crew wandered out, followed respectfully and silently by the others. The Kid and Curtis came last.

"I'm done for, Kid!" Curtis remarked, as they strolled slowly down towards the river. "I knew, I'd give everything I've got if Uncle James wasn't coming to-morrow. But I've just got to go! Won't the Fifth rub it in!"

"If they win," said the Kid; but in his heart he knew that if Curtis didn't pull at bow to-morrow there wasn't a shadow of doubt that the Fifth would win.

CHAPTER 2.

Weaver of Spells.

DENTER and Curtis saw very little of the trial that afternoon. The Kangaroo wanted sympathy; he wanted to tell someone all about the relatives who were coming to Dulchester to-morrow, and get them to understand that it wasn't his fault at all.

And the Kid listened. He saw the stiff, stilted sort of letter which Curtis had received from—of all people in the world—“Your affectionate Grandmother.”

It was not a very long letter. With some surprise they had heard the news that James Curtis was in England, and as his Uncle James was proposing to motor through Dulchester with his mother on Wednesday next, they proposed to stop at the Belvoir Hotel for an hour or so in the hope that, if Jimmy Curtis cared to see them, he would make it convenient to call on them about 3.30.

“Your Uncle Alfred has written to your headmaster, explaining the circumstances, and begging him to grant you leave should you wish to see us.”

“It’s a queer sort of letter,” the Kid said when he had read it. “I mean—they don’t seem very keen. Who are they? What are they like? Why didn’t you tell the Beak you didn’t want to see them?”

Curtis explained. It was really rather complicated, and there was a sort of family feud mixed up in it which the Kangaroo himself didn’t understand properly. When Curtis’ grandfather got married a second time, Curtis’ father didn’t really approve, so he packed up and went off to Australia, where he got married, settled down, and made a pretty big name for himself.

“But the governor told me something about it before I came away,” the Kangaroo went on. “He was going to let them know eventually that I was in England, but I hadn’t to write to them. If they wrote me, suggesting they’d like to see me—well, I’d just got to go and see them. He must have told the Head something about it, because he’s very keen on my going. So there we are!”

“But you’ve never actually met them? Don’t know what they’re like?” the Kid demanded.

“I shan’t know ‘em from Adam,” the Kangaroo answered. “If they like me—Oh, I don’t know! It makes me weep!”

But the Kid kept on asking questions until he knew just about as much as Curtis himself did: And that wasn’t much. Still, he was very sympathetic with Curtis, and said that he quite understood how he felt about letting the Form down; but, of course, if the Beak said he must go, Curtis would simply have to go—and the Trans would lose the race.

As they wandered back to the school again Bill Strong joined the Kid. For a time he didn’t say a word, but the Kid could tell by the far-away look in Bill’s eyes that what he wanted was sympathy.

“It’s rotten luck, Bill,” he said at last. “I let you down over the cricket-match, and now Curtis lands you in the soup, just when we’ve got a chance to make the Fifth sorry for themselves!”

“Yes,” Bill nodded. “I wish—But what’s the good of wishing. If only these giddy relatives of his would break their little necks, or if we could bind Curtis up till three-thirty and then shove him in the boat, or if—This is the time when you ought to come out with one of your brain-waves, Kid!”

He said it in bitter jest, of course, because it was obvious that even one of the Kid’s brain-waves wouldn’t land

Curtis in the Trans Four to-morrow. The Beak had settled the question beyond all hope of alteration. To the Beak, of course, it didn’t matter who won so long as there was a good race. If it had been against another school he would have taken a different point of view.

When next the Kid spoke it was in that funny, high-pitched voice he sometimes put on when he was playing the heavy uncle stunt.

“From your remarks, Bill, I gather that if I could land Curtis into your four to-morrow afternoon you would regard it as some atonement for the grievous error of judgment made by me on the occasion of the last match with the Fifth Form?”

“Sorry, Kid,” said Bill wearily. “I didn’t mean to remind you of that. It was hard luck for both of us, that was. And this is harder luck—for me and for the Form.”

“I’m glad you put it in that light, Bill,” said the Kid. “Just stand still for one moment!”

The Kid had taken out his watch and was kneeling on the grass on one knee. He balanced the watch carefully on the bent knee and turned it round very slowly, looking up towards the sky every now and then.

“What giddy game are you playing now?” Bill demanded, almost irritably. This wasn’t a time for fooling!

“Sh!” The Kid raised a warning finger and pulled a blade of grass, which he held above his watch. Then he breathed a long drawn-out sigh.

“Ah-h-h-h-h-h!” he murmured. “Kismet! The Finger of Fate! It is good!”

He rose to his feet, and his eyes were shining brightly as he faced Bill Strong.

“That’s all right, Bill!” he said gladly. “Don’t you worry any more about to-morrow. And whatever you do, don’t breathe a word to anyone that you’ve seen me playing about with the mysteries of black magic, because the Beak wouldn’t like it. But it’s all right, Bill! Curtis will row to-morrow!”

“Chuck it!” Bill said.

“The Kid grasped him by the arms and looked straight up into his eyes.

“Bill,” he said seriously, “am I the sort to play fool tricks when so much is at stake? Never! There are a lot of things you don’t understand, my lad, but I do. I’ve just been weaving a spell, and the Finger of Fate pointed correctly, which shows that the spell is cast. At this very moment, probably, Curtis’ relatives are in a cab-accident. Waugh! I have spoken!”

“Cut it out!” Bill implored, and began to walk on again.

“Don’t mention it to anyone else, Bill, but just make up your mind quite firmly that Curtis will row to-morrow. There isn’t the slightest doubt about it. I’ve just fixed the whole thing up, and I’ve done it for your sake, Bill. When it’s all over and you’ve left the Fifth gasping for breath, think of me, Bill, and say to yourself, ‘The Kid won this race to make up for letting me down over the cricket-match.’ But say it to yourself, Bill!”

Somehow Bill began to take an interest in the game, then. He had a feeling that the Kid was really trying on some new stunt, and he wanted to know about it. But Dexter went on talking about casting spells and having studied the art of magic and all that sort of hot air, mixed up with repeated warnings to Bill not to give the faintest hint to anybody that he knew Curtis would be in the boat to-morrow.

“It would destroy the spell, Bill,”

he explained. “Even when you’ve won the race don’t mention the name of Dexter. It’s most important to keep to the rules, or else Kismet, the Finger of Fate, will get annoyed with me for revealing his giddy secrets. You think I’m acting the giddy goat, but I’m not, my lad. It’s a very serious business, and if anything goes wrong, or if you reveal the secret, there might be earthquakes and things of that sort. Curtis will row to-morrow! You trust your Uncle Richard!”

And after that the Kid began to talk quite sensibly about other things. He left Bill before they reached Study No. 10, as he had an important appointment, so he said.

Strong didn’t quite know what to think about the Kid’s talk. You see, he was so terrifically keen on the idea that Curtis would row to-morrow that he grasped at the faintest hope. On the other hand, the Beak knew all about Curtis going to the Belvoir Hotel, and it was obviously impossible for the Kid to play any fancy tricks over a job in which the headmaster and Jolly Roger were both concerned.

Yet—Bill knew Dickie Dexter! In his time Dexter had done some amazing things.

So Bill went on and talked with the others as though it were quite certain that Heath would row in place of Curtis, but all the time there was a sneaking sort of hope wandering round that something might happen.

There was a cloud over the Transits on the Wednesday morning. Even Jolly Roger seemed to have lost some of his vim, and took them very gently through morning school.

About twelve o’clock the porter, Blott, came in with a note from the headmaster for Mr. Roger Blunt. Jolly Roger opened it, and those who happened to be watching his face saw the glad light come back to his eyes again, and his smile extended joyously.

“Ah! Curtis!” Jolly Roger snapped the words out in his old, just-about-to-burst-with-joy sort of way. “I have a note here from the headmaster, enclosing a telegram which he has received from your relatives. They regret that it is impossible for them to come to Dulchester this afternoon!”

For the space of one second there was dead silence after Roger finished.

Then everybody began to call out: “Good old Curtis! What about it, Bill?”

And Bill Strong’s smile nearly touched his ears, and Curtis was shaking hands with those nearest him.

At his desk Jolly Roger beamed upon this complete break-down of discipline, and not for fully five minutes did he attempt to interfere.

Even then it was a jovial, cheery sort of interference. He tapped his desk lightly with his pointer, and called out to Curtis again.

“You may like to see the telegram, Curtis,” he said, as the row subsided. “It was handed in at ten-forty-five this morning in London—the Strand office! Yes!”

He held it out, and Curtis came up to the desk and took it. It was addressed to the headmaster of St. Katherine’s School, Dulchester, and ran:

“Will you kindly inform my nephew, James Curtis, that, owing to unforeseen circumstances, his grandmother and I will be quite unable to see him this afternoon. Please cancel arrangements.”

“JAMES RANDALL.”

Naturally, Curtis looked at it carefully. So did Jolly Roger.

It's an instinct with most of us to doubt really good news; but there wasn't any doubt about the genuineness of this wire!

There wasn't much work done in the Trans that morning. Jolly Roger talked rowing, and nothing but rowing. He gave them advice, not only to the crew but to the rest of the Form. Some of them were to be at different points to shout out the correct encouragement. Jolly Roger believed in enthusiasm, but at times like this it had to be organised.

"Well, Kid," Bill Strong laughed, when they went out of the Form-room, "I believe there's something in that giddy black magic of yours! Or are you a prophet? I'm hanged if I didn't think for a few seconds that it was one of your little—"

"Shut up!" the Kid hissed, and Bill Strong looked at him in amazement.

What did it matter now? Bill had seen the telegram, and even the Kid's black magic couldn't make Curtis' relatives send a telegram from London!

"All right, Kid," Bill was too happy to argue the matter. "You'll be on the path by the bridge this afternoon? If we're leading—"

"I regret that more important duties will detain me this afternoon," the Kid answered loftily. "I shall not witness the race, but you have my sincere wishes for the success of the Transitus crew!"

"You're not coming?" Bill demanded. "But why? Mean to say you're going to cut the final of the Senior Fours?"

"I have other business, William," Dexter said. "Kismet, the Finger of Fate, demands my presence to pay the proper price for the spell I cast yesterday. Did I not tell you to trust your Uncle Richard? I have spoken!"

And Dickie Dexter chased away, leaving Bill Strong puzzled and perplexed. But not for long. For Bill had more urgent work ahead than worrying about the Kid's jokes this afternoon!

CHAPTER 3.

Jolly Roger Understands.

WHEN Dickie Dexter said that Kismet, the Finger of Fate, required the proper price for the spell which had been cast, it was something more than a joke.

It was a chunk of solid, uncomfortable truth. In his time the Kid had played many jests, but this was one which promised to land him into the biggest row he had ever faced. And the Kid knew it!

He knew it when he first struck the idea, but the spectacle of Bill Strong's misery and the memory of the run-out episode pulled the brakes completely off any sense of discretion that the Kid possessed. He went ahead with his idea, bald-headed and recklessly.

On Tuesday, at tea-time, in the quietness of the library, he wrote a letter to a certain Mr. Jewell, who had become a very good friend of Dexter's since the episode of Dublin's amazing scoop. The Kid knew that Mr. Jewell would be at his London office on Wednesday morning, and he explained carefully that the telegram he wanted Mr. Jewell to send was in connection with a joke they were playing.

Further, he undertook to explain to Mr. Jewell all about it in a later letter, and gave his word that no possible harm could result.

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Mr. Jewell got the letter, examined the telegram, debated the matter carefully, and decided that he could trust Dexter not to do anything too foolish. The office-boy was forthwith dispatched to the Strand post-office, and the telegram was being tapped out before eleven o'clock, as desired.

But now came the real difficulty of the scheme. At 3.30 Curtis' Uncle James, accompanied by his mother, would be waiting at the Belvoir Hotel to meet their relative. Instead of Jimmy Curtis, however, they were going to meet Richard Dexter!

They wouldn't know he wasn't the genuine Curtis, because they'd never seen him before.

Diplomatically, Dickie had also learned that they had never even seen a photograph of Jimmy Curtis, because Curtis' father had never corresponded with them after his disagreement with the family years and years ago.

Even that didn't overcome the difficulties, of course. But the Kid had quite a lot of bright ideas to cope with the rest of the programme. The uncle might be a sport, in which case it might be possible to explain the truth to him.

Or, supposing that didn't come off, the Kid might get through the hour with them, and end up with an invitation to go and spend his holidays there. He would accept, and later on, would explain the truth to Curtis, who, having won the race, would gladly fall in with the idea of explaining everything away to his relatives later on. They could fix up some little yarn about Curtis being ill and not wanting to disappoint them.

Or he might even try that game himself straight away. It depended on how the land lay. The whole business might go off swimmingly, and everything be quite all right. Curtis had said that very probably after his first meeting they'd never want to see him again, and that they'd only done it to annoy him.

In any event, the Kid was well primed for an hour with interesting chat about life in Australia and his experiences in England. He would let Curtis' step-grandmother know that Curtis was a nice, polite boy, with nothing of the disagree-to-the-family about him!

The Belvoir is the swagger hotel of Dulcester, and the Kid entered its doors with the air of the man who owned it. It would take a lot more than the magnificence of the Belvoir to put the Kid off his game!

"Remember," said the Kid to himself, as he entered, "you are now Jimmy Curtis!"

Someone rose from one of the lounges as he went along the hall.

Dexter turned and looked at the man, but it wasn't Curtis' uncle. It was a young man, with the very faintest suspicion of a moustache and a cheerful smile on his face. On the lounge near him was a charming lady; but it wasn't Curtis' grandmother, because she was quite young, and she wasn't attired in motoring-clothes.

That was a bit of smart detective-work on the Kid's part, but, unfortunately, it was totally and completely wrong. As he asked one of the gold-braided attendants hanging about the hall for Mr. James Randall, the tall young man stepped forward.

"Looking for me?" he asked Dexter. "My name's Randall; I'm expecting a young relative of mine—Jimmy Curtis!"

The Kid pulled himself together at that.

"How are you—er—Uncle James?" he gasped. It seemed silly to call this fellow "uncle," because he didn't look a bit like one. "And how is my dear grandmother?"

"And you—you are Jimmy Curtis—from St. Katharine's School?" the young man asked.

"I've just come down from the school now," the Kid answered cheerfully, though, of course, he was feeling the strain a little. "The letter from grandmother came yesterday, and, of course, the Head had had the letter from Uncle Alfred, so it was quite all right!"

"He—he said you could come to meet us?" James Randall spoke in a surprised sort of voice, and the Kid thought that he didn't seem very enthusiastic about the meeting.

"Of course!" Dexter decided to keep on with his part for a time until he found out how the land lay. "Mr. Bird always gives us permission for things of this sort—family reunions, and all that kind of business."

"I see." The young man still stared at the Kid. "I'm very glad you've come—very glad! I—I'll just go and tell my mother you've come. She'll be glad."

He crossed over to the lounge again, and spoke to the charming lady sitting there. The Kid thought that he took quite a long time to explain the matter, and he began to feel a little uneasy.

But the lady very quickly altered the situation when she came up. She greeted him gladly, and for a grandmother was really very lively. Of course, as she explained, she wasn't really Jimmy's grandmother, but his step-grandmother, but they thought it was so much nicer in the family.

"But you must come upstairs," Mrs. Randall said. "I want to have a long talk to you! Did your father ever mention me to you?"

"Oh, yes! Just before I came away," he suggested that if you wished to see me at all, I was to be sure and accept your invitation."

Apparently they had engaged a private sitting-room at the hotel, and the table was laid for a light meal. Mrs. Randall explained that they had been motoring, and needed something more substantial than afternoon tea.

"Do you know Mr. Roger Blunt?" James Randall asked abruptly.

He was strolling round in a queer sort of way, and the Kid didn't quite know what to make of him. He looked a jolly decent chap of about seven-and-twenty, but he seemed to have some trouble on his mind. Just at first the Kid felt uneasy about him; but he came to the conclusion that Uncle James was simply bored with this business, and didn't want to take any part in it.

"Yes, of course!" Dexter, alias Jimmy Curtis, promptly answered. "He's our Form-master!"

"Good!" James Randall nodded, and looked frightfully serious.

Mrs. Randall went on talking; and Dickie found himself making quite good progress with his "step-grandmother."

"Is Rog—Mr. Blunt at the school this afternoon?" James Randall came out with another of his questions.

"Of course!" The Kid was struggling hard to keep very cheerful. "That is, I think he's taking part in some races on the river. It's the final of the Senior Fours this afternoon."

"I expect you would have preferred

"I see," said James Randall, and stepped to the door. "I'll be back presently; I just want to see if they've lived up to the air all right!"

"Have you ever had that queer feeling that everything is quite all right, only there's a mystery hanging round someone? It's the sort of feeling you can't put into words, because there's really nothing to explain, and yet—"

The Kid had the feeling this afternoon. It had nothing to do with the knowledge that he was playing a deceptive part. Indeed, he had almost forgotten about the explanations he wanted to make, because if you understand, neither Mrs. Randall nor her son seemed to be really and truly interested in Jimmy Curtis.

As far as the Kid could make out, it was just what Jimmy Curtis had said. They were determined to show that if there had been a row in years gone by they weren't keeping it up, so they'd just come down to Dulchester, and were putting in an hour on a schooner; they didn't care twopence about in order to show that they weren't responsible for the row.

Mrs. Randall was quite nice; but Dickie felt that she was just being pleasant because she'd made up her mind to be pleasant. In turn the Kid went on being pleasant and talking hot air about the advantages of modern education, and silly things of that kind.

"I am glad you are under Mr. Blunt," Mrs. Randall said presently. "He was a master at Willoughby when James was captain of the school, you know. James hasn't seen him for years, of course; but your Uncle Alfred told your father that Mr. Blunt was now at St. Katherine's." "I never understood that," said the Kid brightly, and hoped and prayed that James would be a very long time before he saw Mr. Roger Blunt again.

In another hour this face would be over, so the Kid hoped! He decided that he would say nothing at all of the truth to Mrs. Randall, though he would explain everything to Curtis when he got back. But it was very plain that the Randalls weren't at all keen on renewing their relationship with the Curtis family.

The situation became more and more trying. There came a time when the Kid felt that he was justified in saying good-bye, and he rose.

"Must you really go?" his "grandmother" asked, perfectly politely, but without any enthusiasm. "James will surely be back very shortly. I should like you to see your Uncle James again before you go."

And just then the door opened and Uncle James came in. There was a queer little smile on his face; but the Kid hadn't time to wonder about it, because two other people followed him into the room.

Mr. Roger Blunt, accompanied by the blonde Jimmy Curtis, entered!

Mr. Blunt was still wearing his sweater and flannel trousers, and Curtis was in a similar rig-out. He had slipped them on quickly at the boathouse, and Mr. James Randall's ear had whisked them down here.

Jolly Roger was smiling grimly. Jimmy Curtis was smiling in a sort of happy daze.

"I've solved the mystery!" James Randall announced triumphantly. "This is Jimmy, mother!"

"Oh, you dear boy!" Mrs. Randall flew at Jimmy, and clasped him to her arms. "But what—what does it all mean? Who is this impostor, James?"

James Randall was seeing the Kid. So was Roger. In the background

Jimmy Curtis was still smiling hazily, and he was trying to wink at the Kid.

But Dexter didn't see him. He was in the same position as the little bird is to the snake—he was fascinated by Roger's eagerness, which was upon him.

How had it all happened? What about the race? What would happen to him now? A hundred questions were darting through the Kid's mind, and he heard very little of what James Randall was saying, though he grasped the purport of it all.

The renewal of family ties between Mr. Curtis, of Australia, and his step-mother and step-brother, as well as his elder brother Alfred, had been proceeding for some time. It is a complicated story, and doesn't concern this present case very much, except that a photograph of Jimmy, taken just before he left Australia, had been sent to Mrs. Randall. Jimmy's father had also told them proudly what a big lad he was, and a few other details which would enable them to recognise him instantly in a crowd.

Imagine their surprise when they saw the bright-eyed but diminutive Kid walk into the hotel and inquire for them and palm himself off as the genuine Jimmy Curtis!

Mr. James Randall was perplexed. He felt there was a mystery knocking round, and it bothered him to go cautiously. Wherefore he mentioned the matter to his mother, and then motored full speed to St. Katherine's, where he managed to track Mr. Blunt down at the boathouse.

Brief explanations having been made, Jimmy Curtis was declared, and they all dashed back to the hotel. None of them really understood yet what had happened—though some of them had a jolly good idea!

"Do you know this boy, Mr. Blunt?" James Randall asked.

"I do!" said Roger. "He is in the same Form, same dormitory, and same study as young Curtis. I regard the two of them as my own pet lambs. They make life one perpetual hardship for me. When Curtis isn't getting Dexter into trouble, Dexter is arranging a packet of trouble for Curtis. I suppose you were responsible for the telegram to the Head this morning, Dexter?"

"Yes, sir," said Dexter meekly, and quite clearly he saw the Finger of Fate.

It was pointing to the long, lone road—away from Katie's!

"You may leave the room, Dexter," said Roger, just as though he were in the old Form-room. "I will see you outside—when I have apologised for your conduct."

"Yes, sir," said Dexter, and hesitated.

"Who—who won the Senior Fours, sir?"

"Ah," said Roger, and he forgot to be stern. "We won, Dexter! A couple of lengths—easily. A splendid race! The Transitus were behind until— But what right have you to ask such questions? I am forgetting. Leave the room, sir!"

And Dexter went out. He still felt dazed, and his mind refused to grapple with the problem of what was going to happen to him now. But the Transitus had won!

Not for fully a quarter of an hour did the door open, and when it did Mr. Blunt came out with "Uncle James" and was chatting genially with him.

"I'm very glad indeed to meet you again, my dear Randall," Roger was saying. "Strange how small this world is! Of course, I hadn't the faintest idea, even when I saw the telegram this morning, that you were 'Randall of Willoughby's.'"

"I knew you were at St. Katie's, sir," Randall said, and he didn't seem worried

at all now. "You've still a pretty stiff crowd to deal with."

"Stuff!" Roger laughed. "Ah, Dexter! Mr. Randall considers that you are a worthless and disgraceful impostor, and that you will certainly be imprisoned for a long term if the Head ever hears of the way in which he has been deceived. However, he has begged me to keep the sad news from the headmaster, and, after much persuasion, I have agreed. I shall deal with the matter myself."

"Yes, sir," said Dexter. "I want to apologise, sir, to Mrs. Randall and Mr. Randall. If they only understood how important it was to the Form, sir—"

Dexter had thought out this speech; but, somehow, it sounded feeble, and he hesitated. James Randall was laughing.

"You've got enough cool cheek to win anything, Dexter?" he said. "Come and tell the whole yarn to my mother! She's frightfully keen, you know, Mr. Blunt, on boys playing the game, and she'll think no end of young Dexter now she knows all about it!"

Mrs. Randall and Jimmy Curtis appeared. Jimmy was looking like a good little boy out of a prize book now, but he introduced the Kid to his grandmother as though they hadn't met before.

"This is my young friend Dexter," he explained; and after that everybody began to talk again.

Mrs. Randall was quite different, and seemed less like a grandmother than ever. Uncle James was a pleasant fellow, who regarded Mr. Blunt as a sort of wonderful person, who couldn't make a mistake.

And then they all said good-bye again, and Mr. Blunt took Jimmy Curtis and the Kid into his care once more. They got a taxi-cab and Mr. Blunt took them back to the school.

It was not until they were in the cab that the Kid got to know just what was likely to happen to him over this affair. Jolly Roger explained quite fully.

"Dexter," he said seriously, "your conduct is absolutely inexcusable! I need scarcely point out to you that to send that telegram, and to do as you have done, is deserving of the gravest possible censure. Were I headmaster of St. Katherine's I should have no choice in the matter whatever. I should expel you! You understand that quite clearly, Dexter?"

"Yes, sir," Dexter agreed.

"Fortunately," Roger said, less seriously, "I am not the headmaster. I can take a milder view, and I believe that you were blinded in the grave wrong you committed by your anxiety to see the Transitus win the Senior Fours. I can understand that, because I felt the same anxiety myself. And it was a good race, wasn't it, Curtis?"

He spoke proudly, and Curtis answered sincerely. And both of them looked at Dexter glady.

"Wherefore, Dexter," said Roger, with his high-pressure smile full on. "I will only remind you of the wise saying that to understand is to forgive. I understand. But, for my sake, for your own sake, and for everybody's sake, let the whole story be preserved as a strict secret. That is all."

And that really is all. Even Bill Strong never knew the full story.

But the Senior Fours should be safely in the Transitus Form-room, and the Bill Strong should once again treat Bill Strong with that respect which was his rightful due.

THE END.

(Another grand long story of St. Katie's next week, entitled "SMITH OF THE FIFTH: Make a point of ordering your copy EARLY!")

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THE EDITOR'S CHAT.

Note:—Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Address Editor, The "Gem," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

FOR NEXT FRIDAY.

I have much pleasure in announcing to my numerous readers that next week I shall present to them

TWO GRAND SCHOOL TALES.

The first, a Splendid Long Complete Story of the famous Chums of St. Jim's, is entitled:

"THE FINAL RECKONING!"

By Martin Clifford.

It is the sequel of this week's fine yarn, and deals with the mysterious abduction of Miss Marie and the methods adopted by John Rivers, the ex-crackman, now a Scotland Yard detective, to get on the track of the notorious gang. The story of his dangerous quest will thrill every reader. Don't miss

"THE FINAL RECKONING!"

The second item will consist of a superb story of Dickie Dexter & Co. at St. Katie's, entitled:

"SMITHY OF THE FIFTH!"

By Michael Poole.

telling how Smith, a comparatively new character to my chums, and the Kid become involved in an unpleasant mystery which is puzzling the school.

In addition, there is:

"A NEW CHUM IN AUSTRALIA!"

By "Coose."

another splendid story of Jack Thornton's adventures and experiences of wild life "down under" And:

"MY READERS' OWN CORNER!"

our special "half-crown" page, which has proved such a great success with my chums.

BUNTER AND CRICKET!

No, it is not Bunter who writes for the address of Harrow School, but a firm friend of mine at Loftus-in-Cleveland. The address of Harrow School is Harrow, Middlesex—just that, and a letter would get there, so inscribed, from the uttermost parts of the world. Bunter is playing cricket this season of a sort, but he is not likely to become a

member of Stanwood Invicta. C. Reason, 72, Tunia Road, Shepherd's Bush, W., asks me to state that matches are wanted by Invicta; ages 15-16.

MISSING!

Will Charlie Hawes please communicate with Fred O'Keefe, 67, Westville Road, Shepherd's Bush, W.12? Both my correspondent and his chum are keen readers of the Companion Papers.

THE ETON CLUB.

This is not the Eton by Windsor, but the Australian Eton, and Charles A. Martin, jun., is running a club there, which should interest home readers as much as those overseas. The address is 54, Hopetoun Street, Paddington, Sydney, N.S.W., Australia.

CROWDED OUT!

Owing to the extra length of Martin Clifford's powerful story, I have to hold over the story of Jack Thornton's further adventures in Australia for this week. I am sorry, but a paper is not like a gladstone bag, you know. When it's full, you can't cram anything more into it!

Your Editor

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